HUMORESQUE

FANNIE HURST

[See page 40

HE CAPERED THROUGH THE MELODY OF DVORÁK'S, WHICH IS AS IRONIC AS A GRINNING MASK

HUMORESQUE

A LAUGH ON LIFE WITH
A TEAR BEHIND IT

By FANNIE HURST

WITH FRONTISPIECE

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HUMORESQUE

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To
Daniel Frohman

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HUMORESQUE

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ON either side of the Bowery, which cuts through like a drain to catch its sewage, Every Man's Land, a reeking march of humanity and humidity, steams with the excrement of seventeen languages, flung in *patois* from tenement windows, fire-escapes, curbs, stoops, and cellars whose walls are terrible and spongy with fungi.

By that impregnable chemistry of race whereby the red blood of the Mongolian and the red blood of the Caucasian become as oil and water in the mingling, Mulberry Street, bounded by sixteen languages, runs its intact Latin length of push-carts, clothes-lines, naked babies, drying vermicelli; black-eyed women in rhinestone combs and perennially big with child; whole families of buttonhole-makers, who first saw the blue-and-gold light of Sorrento, bent at home work round a single gas flare; pomaded barbers of a thousand Neapolitan amours. And then, just as suddenly, almost without osmosis and by the mere stepping down from the curb, Mulberry becomes Mott Street, hung in grill-work balconies, the moldy smell of poverty touched up with incense. Orientals whose feet shuffle and whose faces are

carved out of satinwood. Forbidden women, their white, drugged faces behind upper windows. Yellow children, incongruous enough in Western clothing. A draughty areaway with an oblique of gaslight and a black well of descending staircase. Show-windows of jade and tea and Chinese porcelains.

More streets emanating out from Mott like a handful of crooked rheumatic fingers, then suddenly the Bowery again, cowering beneath Elevated trains, where men burned down to the butt end of soiled lives pass in and out and out and in of the knee-high swinging doors, a veiny-nosed, acid-eaten race in themselves.

Allen Street, too, still more easterly, and half as wide, is straddled its entire width by the steely, long-legged skeleton of Elevated traffic, so that its third-floor windows no sooner shudder into silence from the rushing shock of one train than they are shaken into chatter by the passage of another. Indeed, third-floor dwellers of Allen Street, reaching out, can almost touch the serrated edges of the Elevated structure, and in summer the smell of its hot rails becomes an actual taste in the mouth. Passengers, in turn, look in upon this horizontal of life as they whiz by. Once, in fact, the blurry figure of what might have been a woman leaned out, as she passed, to toss into one Abrahm Kantor's apartment a short-stemmed pink carnation. It hit softly on little Leon Kantor's crib, brushing him fragrantly across the mouth and causing him to pucker up.

Beneath, where even in August noonday, the

sun cannot find its way by a chink, and babies lie stark naked in the cavernous shade, Allen Street presents a sort of submarine and greenish gloom, as if its humanity were actually moving through a sea of aqueous shadows, faces rather bleached and shrunk from sunlessness as water can bleach and shrink. And then, like a shimmering background of orange-finned and copper-flanked marine life, the brass-shops of Allen Street, whole rows of them, burn flamelessly and without benefit of fuel.

To enter Abrahm Kantor's—Brasses, was three steps down, so that his casement show-window, at best filmed over with the constant rain of dust ground down from the rails above, was obscure enough, but crammed with copied loot of khedive and of czar. The seven-branch candlestick so biblical and supplicating of arms. An urn, shaped like Rebecca's, of brass, all beaten over with little pocks. Things—cups, trays, knockers, ikons, gargoyles, bowls, and teapots. A symphony of bells in graduated sizes. Jardinières with fat sides. A pot-bellied samovar. A swinging-lamp for the dead, star-shaped. Against the door, an octave of tubular chimes, prisms of voiceless harmony and of heatless light.

Opening this door, they rang gently, like melody heard through water and behind glass. Another bell rang, too, in tilted singsong from a pulley operating somewhere in the catacomb rear of this lambent vale of things and things and things. In turn, this pulley set in toll still another bell, two flights up in Abrahm Kantor's tenement, which overlooked the

front of whizzing rails and a rear wilderness of gibbet-looking clothes-lines, dangling perpetual specters of flapping union suits in a mid-air flaky with soot.

Often at lunch, or even the evening meal, this bell would ring in on Abrahm Kantor's digestive well-being, and while he hurried down, napkin often bib-fashion still about his neck, and into the smouldering lanes of copper, would leave an eloquent void at the head of his well-surrounded table.

This bell was ringing now, jingling in upon the slumber of a still newer Kantor, snuggling peacefully enough within the ammoniac depths of a cradle recently evacuated by Leon, heretofore impinged upon you.

On her knees before an oven that billowed forth hotly into her face, Mrs. Kantor, fairly fat and not yet forty, and at the immemorial task of plumbing a delicately swelling layer-cake with broom-straw, raised her face, reddened and faintly moist.

"Isadore, run down and say your papa is out until six. If it's a customer, remember the first asking-price is the two middle figures on the tag, and the last asking-price is the two outside figures. See once, with your papa out to buy your little brother his birthday present, and your mother in a cake, if you can't make a sale for first price."

Isadore Kantor, aged eleven and hunched with a younger Kantor over an oilcloth-covered table, hunched himself still deeper in a barter for a large crystal marble with a candy stripe down its center.

"Izzie, did you hear me?"

"Yes 'm."

"Go down this minute—do you hear? Rudolph, stop always letting your big brother get the best of you in marbles. Iz-zie!"

"In-a-minute."

"Don't let me have to ask you again, Isadore Kantor!"

"Aw, ma, I got some 'rithmetic to do. Let Esther go!"

"Always Esther! Your sister stays right in the front room with her spelling."

"Aw, ma, I got spelling, too."

"Every time I ask that boy he should do me one thing, right away he gets lessons! With me, that lessons-talk don't go no more. Every time you get put down in school, I'm surprised there's a place left lower where they can put you. Working-papers for such a boy like you!"

"I'll woik—"

"How I worried myself! Violin lessons yet—thirty cents a lesson out of your papa's pants while he slept! That's how I wanted to have in the family a profession—maybe a musician on the violin! Lessons for you out of money I had to lie to your papa about! Honest, when I think of it—my own husband—it's a wonder I don't potch you just for remembering it. Rudolph, will you stop licking that cake-pan? It's saved for your little brother Leon. Ain't you ashamed even on your little brother's birthday to steal from him?"

"Ma, gimme the spoon?"

"I'll give you the spoon, Isadore Kantor, where you don't want it. If you don't hurry down, the

way that bell is ringing, not one bite do you get out of your little brother's birthday-cake to-night!"

"I'm goin', ain't I?"

"Always on my children's birthdays a meanness sets into this house! Ru-dolph, will you put down that bowl! Iz-zie—for the last time I ask you—for the last time—"

Erect now, Mrs. Kantor lifted an expressive hand, letting it hover.

"I'm goin', ma; for golly sakes, I'm goin'!" said her recalcitrant one, shuffling off toward the staircase, shuffling, shuffling.

Then Mrs. Kantor resumed her plumbing, and through the little apartment, its middle and only bedroom of three beds and a crib lighted vicariously by the front room and kitchen, began to wind the warm, the golden-brown fragrance of cake in the rising.

By six o'clock the shades were drawn against the dirty dusk of Allen Street and the oilcloth-covered table dragged out center and spread by Esther Kantor, nine in years, in the sturdy little legs bulging over shoe-tops, in the pink cheeks that sagged slightly of plumpness, and in the utter roundness of face and gaze, but mysteriously older in the little-mother lore of crib and knee-dandling ditties and in the ropy length and thickness of the two brown plaits down her back.

There was an eloquence to that waiting, laid-out table, the print of the family already gathered about it; the dynastic high chair, throne of each

succeeding Kantor; an armchair drawn up before the paternal mustache-cup; the ordinary kitchen chair of Mannie Kantor, who spilled things, an oil-cloth sort of bib dangling from its back; the little chair of Leon Kantor, cushioned in an old family album that raised his chin above the table. Even in cutlery the Kantor family was not lacking in variety. Surrounding a centerpiece of thick Russian lace were Russian spoons washed in washed-off gilt; forks of one, two, and three tines; steel knives with black handles; a hartshorn carving-knife. Thick-lipped china in stacks before the armchair. A round four-pound loaf of black bread waiting to be torn, and to-night, on the festive mat of cotton lace, a cake of pinkly gleaming icing, encircled with five pink little candles.

At slightly after six Abrahm Kantor returned, leading by a resisting wrist Leon Kantor, his stemlike little legs, hit midship, as it were, by not sufficiently cut-down trousers and so narrow and birdlike of face that his eyes quite obliterated the remaining map of his features, like those of a still wet nestling. All except his ears. They poised at the sides of Leon's shaved head of black bristles, as if butterflies had just lighted there, whispering, with very spread wings, their message, and presently would fly off again. By some sort of muscular contraction he could wiggle these ears at will, and would do so for a penny or a whistle, and upon one occasion for his brother Rudolph's dead rat, so devised as to dangle from string and window before the unhappy passer-by. They were quivering now, these ears,

but because the entire little face was twitching back tears and gulp of sobs.

"Abrahm—Leon—what is it?" Her hands and her forearms instantly out from the business of kneading something meaty and floury, Mrs. Kantor rushed forward, her glance quick from one to the other of them. "Abrahm, what's wrong?"

"I'll feedle him! I'll feedle him!"

The little pulling wrist still in clutch, Mr. Kantor regarded his wife, the lower half of his face, well covered with reddish bristles, undershot, his free hand and even his eyes violently lifted. To those who see in a man a perpetual kinship to that animal kingdom of which he is supreme, there was something undeniably anthropoidal about Abrahm Kantor, a certain simian width between the eyes and long, rather agile hands with hairy backs.

"Hush it!" cried Mr. Kantor, his free hand raised in threat of descent, and cowering his small son to still more undersized proportions. "Hush it or, by golly! I'll—"

"Abrahm—Abrahm—what is it?"

Then Mr. Kantor gave vent in acridity of word and feature.

"*Schlemmil!*" he cried. "*Momser! Ganef! Nebich!*" by which, in smiting mother tongue, he branded his offspring with attributes of apostate and ne'er-do-well, of idiot and thief.

"Abrahm!"

"*Schlemmil!*" repeated Mr. Kantor, swinging Leon so that he described a large semicircle that landed him into the meaty and waiting embrace of

his mother. "Take him! You should be proud of such a little *momser* for a son! Take him, and here you got back his birthday dollar. A feedle! Honest —when I think on it—a feedle!"

Such a rush of outrage seemed fairly to strangle Mr. Kantor that he stood, hand still upraised, choking and inarticulate above the now frankly howling huddle of his son.

"Abrahm, you should just once touch this child! How he trembles! Leon—mamma's baby—what is it? Is this how you come back when papa takes you out to buy your birthday present? Ain't you ashamed?"

Mouth distended to a large and blackly hollow O, Leon, between terrifying spells of breath-holding, continued to howl.

"All the way to Naftel's toy-store I drag him. A birthday present for a dollar his mother wants he should have, all right, a birthday present! I give you my word till I'm ashamed for Naftel, every toy in his shelves is pulled down. Such a cow—that shakes with his head—"

"No—no—no!" This from young Leon, beating at his mother's skirts.

Again the upraised but never quite descending hand of his father.

"By golly! I'll 'no—no' you!"

"Abrahm—go 'way! Baby, what did papa do?"

Then Mr. Kantor broke into an actual tarantella of rage, his hands palms up and dancing.

"'What did papa do?' she asks. She's got easy asking. 'What did papa do?' The whole shop, I

tell you. A sheep with a baa inside when you squeeze on him—games—a horn so he can holler my head off—such a knife like Izzie's with a scissors in it. 'Leon,' I said, ashamed for Naftel, 'that's a fine knife like Izzie's so you can cut up with. All right, then'—when I see how he hollers—'such a box full of soldiers to have war with.' 'Dollar seventy-five,' says Naftel. 'All right, then,' I says, when I seen how he keeps hollering. 'Give you a dollar fifteen for 'em.' I should make myself small for fifteen cents more. 'Dollar fifteen,' I says—anything so he should shut up with his hollering for what he seen in the window."

"He seen something in the window he wanted, Abrahm?"

"Didn't I tell you? A feedle! A four-dollar feedle! A moosicer, so we should have another feedler in the family for some thirty-cents lessons."

"Abrahm—you mean—he—our Leon—wanted a violin?"

"'Wanted,' she says. I could potch him again this minute for how he wanted it! *Du*—you little bum you—*chammer—momser*—I'll feedle you!"

Across Mrs. Kantor's face, as she knelt there in the shapeless cotton-stuff uniform of poverty, through the very tenement of her body, a light had flashed up into her eyes. She drew her son closer, crushing his puny cheek up against hers, cupping his bristly little head in her by no means immaculate palms.

"He wanted a violin! It's come, Abrahm! The dream of all my life—my prayers—it's come!

I knew it must be one of my children if I waited long enough—and prayed enough. A musician! He wants a violin! He cried for a violin! My baby! Why, darlink, mamma 'll sell her clothes off her back to get you a violin. He's a musician, Abrahm! I should have known it the way he's fooling always around the chimes and the bells in the store!"

Then Mr. Kantor took to rocking his head between his palms.

"Oi—oi! The mother is crazier as her son. A moosician! A *fresser*, you mean. Such an eater, it's a wonder he ain't twice too big instead of twice too little for his age."

"That's a sign, Abrahm; geniuses, they all eat big. For all we know, he's a genius. I swear to you, Abrahm, all the months before he was born I prayed for it. Each one before they came, I prayed it should be the one. I thought that time the way our Isadore ran after the organ-grinder he would be the one. How could I know it was the monkey he wanted? When Isadore wouldn't take to it I prayed my next one, and then my next one, should have the talent. I've prayed for it, Abrahm. If he wants a violin, please, he should have it."

"Not with my money."

"With mine! I've got enough saved, Abrahm. Them three extra dollars right here inside my own waist. Just that much for that cape down on Grand Street. I wouldn't have it now, the way they say the wind blows up them—"

"I tell you the woman's crazy—"

"I feel it! I know he's got talent! I know my

children so well. A—a father don't understand. I'm so next to them. It's like I can tell always everything that will happen to them—it's like a pain—somewheres here—like in back of my heart."

"A pain in the heart she gets."

"For my own children I'm always a prophet, I tell you! You think I didn't know that—that terrible night after the pogrom after we got out of Kief to across the border! You remember, Abrahm, how I predicted it to you then—how our Mannie would be born too soon and—and not right from my suffering! Did it happen on the ship to America just the way I said it would? Did it happen just exactly how I predicted our Izzie would break his leg that time playing on the fire-escape? I tell you, Abrahm, I get a real pain here under my heart that tells me what comes to my children. Didn't I tell you how Esther would be the first in her confirmation-class and our baby Boris would be red-headed? At only five years, our Leon all by himself cries for a fiddle—get it for him, Abrahm—get it for him!"

"I tell you, Sarah, I got a crazy woman for a wife! It ain't enough we celebrate eight birthdays a year with one-dollar presents each time and copper goods every day higher. It ain't enough that right to-morrow I got a fifty-dollar note over me from Sol Ginsberg; a four-dollar present she wants for a child that don't even know the name of a feedle."

"Leon, baby, stop hollering. Papa will go back and get the fiddle for you now before supper. See, mamma's got money here in her waist—"

"Papa will go back for the feedle *not*—three dollars she's saved for herself he can holler out of her for a feedle!"

"Abrahm, he's screaming so he—he'll have a fit."

"He should have two fits."

"Darlink—"

"I tell you the way you spoil your children it will some day come back on us."

"It's his birthday night, Abrahm—five years since his little head first lay on the pillow next to me."

"All right—all right—drive me crazy because he's got a birthday."

"Leon baby—if you don't stop hollering you'll make yourself sick. Abrahm, I never saw him like this—he's green—"

"I'll green him. Where is that old feedle from Isadore—that seventy-five-cents one?"

"I never thought of that! You broke it that time you got mad at Isadore's lessons. I'll run down. Maybe it's with the junk behind the store. I never thought of that fiddle. Leon darlink—wait! Mamma 'll run down and look. Wait, Leon, till mamma finds you a fiddle."

The raucous screams stopped then, suddenly, and on their very lustiest crest, leaving an echoing gash across silence. On willing feet of haste Mrs. Kantor wound down backward the high, ladder-like staircase that led to the brass-shop.

Meanwhile to a gnawing consciousness of dinner-hour had assembled the house of Kantor. Attuned to the intimate atmosphere of the tenement which

is so constantly rent with cry of child, child-bearing, delirium, delirium tremens, Leon Kantor had howled no impression into the motley din of things. There were Isadore, already astride his chair, leaning well into center table, for first vociferous tear at the four-pound loaf; Esther, old at chores, settling an infant into the high chair, careful of tiny fingers in lowering the wooden bib.

"Papa, Izzie's eating first again."

"Put down that loaf and wait until your mother dishes up, or you'll get a potch you won't soon forget."

"Say, pop—"

"Don't 'say, pop' me! I don't want no street-bum freshness from you!"

"I mean, papa, there was an up-town swell in, and she bought one of them seventy-five-cent candlesticks for the first price."

"*Schlemmil! Chammer!*" said Mr. Kantor, rinsing his hands at the sink. "Didn't I always tell you it's the first price, times two, when you see up-town business come in? Haven't I learned it to you often enough a slummer must pay for her nosiness?"

There entered then, on poor, shuffling feet, Mannie Kantor, so marred in the mysterious and ceramic process of life that the brain and the soul had stayed back sooner than inhabit him. Seventeen in years, in the down upon his face and in growth unretarded by any great nervosity of system, his vacuity of face was not that of childhood, but rather as if his light eyes were peering out from some hinterland and wanting so terribly and so dumbly

to communicate what they beheld to brain-cells closed against himself.

At sight of Mannie, Leon Kantor, the tears still wetly and dirtily down his cheeks, left off his black, fierce-eyed stare of waiting long enough to smile, darkly, it is true, but sweetly.

"Giddy-app!" he cried. "Giddy-app!"

And then Mannie, true to habit, would scamper and scamper.

Up out of the traplike stair-opening came the head of Mrs. Kantor, disheveled and a smudge of soot across her face, but beneath her arm, triumphant, a violin of one string and a broken back.

"See, Leon—what mamma got! A violin! A fiddle! Look! The bow, too, I found. It ain't much, baby, but it's a fiddle."

"Aw, ma—that's my old violin. Gimme. I want it. Where'd you find—"

"Hush up, Izzie! This ain't yours no more. See, Leon, what mamma brought you. A violin!"

"Now, you little *chammer*, you got a feedle, and if you ever let me hear you holler again for a feedle, by golly! if I don't—"

From his corner, Leon Kantor reached out, taking the instrument and fitting it beneath his chin, the bow immediately feeling, surely and lightly, for string.

"Look, Abrahm, he knows how to hold it! What did I tell you? A child that never in his life seen a fiddle, except a beggar's on the street!"

Little Esther suddenly cantered down-floor, clapping her chubby hands.

"Lookie—lookie—Leon!"

The baby ceased clattering his spoon against the wooden bib. A silence seemed to shape itself.

So black and so bristly of head, his little clawlike hands hovering over the bow, Leon Kantor withdrew a note, strangely round and given up almost sobbingly from the single string. A note of warm twining quality, like a baby's finger.

"Leon—darlink!"

Fumbling for string and for notes the instrument could not yield up to him, the birdlike mouth began once more to open widely and terribly into the orificial O.

It was then Abrahm Kantor came down with a large hollow resonance of palm against that aperture, lifting his small son and depositing him plop upon the family album.

"Take that! By golly! one more whimper out of you and if I don't make you black-and-blue, birthday or no birthday! Dish up, Sarah, quick, or I'll give him something to cry about."

The five pink candles had been lighted, burning pointedly and with slender little smoke wisps. Regarding them owlishly, the tears dried on Leon's face, his little tongue licking up at them.

"Look how solemn he is, like he was thinking of something a million miles away except how lucky he is he should have a pink birthday-cake. Uh—uh—uh! Don't you begin to holler again. Here, I'm putting the feedle next to you. Uh—uh—uh!"

To a meal plentifully ladled out directly from stove to table, the Kantor family drew up, dipping

first into the rich black soup of the occasion. All except Mrs. Kantor.

"Esther, you dish up. I'm going somewhere. I'll be back in a minute."

"Where you going, Sarah? Won't it keep until—"

But even in the face of query, Sarah Kantor was two flights down and well through the lambent aisles of the copper-shop. Outside, she broke into run, along two blocks of the indescribable bazaar atmosphere of Grand Street, then one block to the right.

Before Naftel's show-window, a jet of bright gas burned into a jibberwock land of toys. There was that in Sarah Kantor's face that was actually lyrical as, fumbling at the bosom of her dress, she entered.

To Leon Kantor, by who knows what symphonic scheme of things, life was a chromatic scale, yielding up to him, through throbbing, living nerves of sheep-gut, the sheerest semitones of man's emotions.

When he tucked his Stradivarius beneath his chin the book of life seemed suddenly translated to him in melody. Even Sarah Kantor, who still brewed for him, on a small portable stove carried from city to city and surreptitiously unpacked in hotel suites, the blackest of soups, and, despite his protestation, would incase his ears of nights in an old home-made device against their flightiness, would oftentimes bleed inwardly at this sense of his isolation.

There was a realm into which he went alone, leaving her as detached as the merest ticket purchaser at the box-office.

At seventeen Leon Kantor had played before the crowned heads of Europe, the aching heads of American capital, and even the shaved head of a South Sea prince. There was a layout of anecdotal gifts, from the molar tooth of the South Sea prince set in a South Sea pearl to a blue-enameled snuff-box incrusted with the rearing-lion coat-of-arms of a very royal house.

At eighteen came the purchase of a king's Stradivarius for a king's ransom, and acclaimed by Sunday supplements to repose of nights in an ivory cradle.

At nineteen, under careful auspices of press agent, the ten singing digits of the son of Abrahm Kantor were insured at ten thousand dollars the finger.

At twenty he had emerged surely and safely from the perilous quicksands which have sucked down whole Lilliputian worlds of infant prodigies.

At twenty-one, when Leon Kantor played a Sunday-night concert, there was a human queue curling entirely around the square block of the opera-house, waiting its one, two, even three and four hours for the privilege of standing room only.

Usually these were Leon Kantor's own people pouring up from the lowly lands of the East Side to the white lands of Broadway, parched for music, these burning brethren of his—old men in that line, frequently carrying their own little folding camp-chairs, not against weariness of the spirit, but of the flesh; youth with Slavic eyes and cheek-bones. These were the six-deep human phalanx which would presently slant down at him from tiers of steepest

balconies and stand frankly emotional and jammed in the unreserved space behind the railing which shut them off from the three-dollar seats of the reserved.

At a very special one of these concerts, dedicated to the meager purses of just these, and held in New York's super opera-house, the Amphitheater, a great bowl of humanity, the metaphor made perfect by tiers of seats placed upon the stage, rose from orchestra to dome. A gigantic cup of a Colosseum lined in stacks and stacks of faces. From the door of his dressing-room, leaning out, Leon Kantor could see a great segment of it, buzzing down into adjustment, orchestra twitting and tuning into it.

In the bare little room, illuminated by a sheaf of roses, just arrived, Mrs. Kantor drew him back by the elbow.

"Leon, you're in a draught."

The amazing years had dealt kindly with Mrs. Kantor. Stouter, softer, apparently even taller, she was full of small new authorities that could shut out cranks, newspaper reporters, and autograph fiends. A fitted-over-corsets black taffeta and a high comb in the graying hair had done their best with her. Pride, too, had left its flush upon her cheeks, like two round spots of fever.

"Leon, it's thirty minutes till your first number. Close that door. Do you want to let your papa and his excitement in on you?"

The son of Sarah Kantor obeyed, leaning his short, rather narrow form in silhouette against the closed door. In spite of slimly dark evening clothes

worked out by an astute manager to the last detail in boyish effects, there was that about him which defied long-haired precedent. Slimly and straightly he had shot up into an unmannered, a short, even a bristly-haired young manhood, disqualifying by a close shave for the older school of hirsute virtuosity.

But his nerves did not spare him. On concert nights they seemed to emerge almost to the surface of him and shriek their exposure.

"Just feel my hands, ma. Like ice."

She dived down into her large silk what-not of a reticule.

"I've got your fleece-lined gloves here, son."

"No—no! For God's sake—not those things! No!"

He was back at the door again, opening it to a slit, peering through.

"They're bringing more seats on the stage. If they crowd me in I won't go on. I can't play if I hear them breathe. Hi—out there—no more chairs! Pa! Hancock—"

"Leon, Leon, ain't you ashamed to get so worked up? Close that door. Have you got a manager who is paid just to see to your comfort? When papa comes, I'll have him go out and tell Hancock you don't want chairs so close to you. Leon, will you mind mamma and sit down?"

"It's a bigger house than the royal concert in Madrid, ma. Why, I never saw anything like it! It's a stampede. God! this is real—this is what gets me, playing for my own! I should have given a concert like this three years ago. I'll do it every

year now. I'd rather play before them than all the crowned heads on earth. It's the biggest night of my life. They're rioting out there, ma—rioting to get in."

"Leon, Leon, won't you sit down, if mamma begs you to?"

He sat then, strumming with all ten fingers upon his knees.

"Try to get quiet, son. Count—like you always do. One—two—three—"

"Please, ma—for God's sake—please—please!"

"Look—such beautiful roses! From Sol Ginsberg, an old friend of papa's he used to buy brasses from eighteen years ago. Six years he's been away with his daughter in Munich. Such a beautiful mezzo they say, engaged already for Metropolitan next season."

"I hate it, ma, if they breathe on my neck."

"Leon darlink, did mamma promise to fix it? Have I ever let you play a concert when you wouldn't be comfortable?"

His long, slim hands suddenly prehensile and cutting a streak of upward gesture, Leon Kantor rose to his feet, face whitening.

"Do it now! Now, I tell you. I won't have them breathe on me. Do you hear me? Now! Now! Now!"

Risen also, her face soft and tremulous for him, Mrs. Kantor put out a gentle, a sedative hand upon his sleeve.

"Son," she said, with an edge of authority even behind her smile, "don't holler at me!"

He grasped her hand with his two and, immediately quiet, lay a close string of kisses along it.

"Mamma," he said, kissing again and again into the palm, "mamma—mamma."

"I know, son; it's nerves!"

"They eat me, ma. Feel—I'm like ice! I didn't mean it; you know I didn't mean it!"

"My baby," she said, "my wonderful boy, it's like I can never get used to the wonder of having you. The greatest one of them all should be mine—a plain woman's like mine!"

He teased her, eager to conciliate and to ride down his own state of quivering.

"Now, ma—now—now—don't forget Rimsky!"

"Rimsky! A man three times your age who was playing concerts before you was born! Is that a comparison? From your clippings-books I can show Rimsky who the world considers the greatest violinist. Rimsky he rubs into me!"

"All right, then, the press-clippings, but did Elsass, the greatest manager of them all, bring me a contract for thirty concerts at two thousand a concert? Now I've got you! Now!"

She would not meet his laughter. "Elsass! Believe me, he'll come to you yet! My boy should worry if he makes fifty thousand a year more or less. Rimsky should have that honor—for so long as he can hold it. But he won't hold it long. Believe me, I don't rest easy in my bed till Elsass comes after you. Not for so big a contract like Rimsky's, but bigger—not for thirty concerts, but for fifty!"

"*Brava! Brava!* There's a woman for you.

More money than she knows what to do with, and then not satisfied!"

She was still too tremulous for banter. "'Not satisfied'? Why, Leon, I never stop praying my thanks for you!"

"All right, then," he cried, laying his icy fingers on her cheek; "to-morrow we'll call a *mignon*—a regular old-fashioned Allen Street prayer-party."

"Leon, you mustn't make fun."

"Make fun of the sweetest girl in this room!"

"'Girl'! Ah, if I could only hold you by me this way, Leon. Always a boy—with me—your poor old mother—your only girl. That's a fear I suffer with, Leon—to lose you to a—girl. That's how selfish the mother of such a wonder-child like mine can get to be."

"All right! Trying to get me married off again. Nice! Fine!"

"Is it any wonder I suffer, son? Twenty-one years to have kept you by me a child. A boy that never in his life was out after midnight except to catch trains. A boy that never has so much as looked at a girl and could have looked at princesses. To have kept you all these years—mine—is it any wonder, son, I never stop praying my thanks for you? You don't believe Hancock, son, the way he keeps always teasing you that you should have a—what he calls—affair—a love-affair? Such talk is not nice, Leon—an affair!"

"Love-affair poppycock!" said Leon Kantor, lifting his mother's face and kissing her on eyes about ready to tear. "Why, I've got something, ma, right here in my heart for you that—"

"Leon, be careful your shirt-front!"

"That's so—so what you call 'tender,' for my best sweetheart that I— Oh, love-affair—poppycock!"

She would not let her tears come.

"My boy—my wonder-boy!"

"There goes the overture, ma."

"Here, darlink—your glass of water."

"I can't stand it in here; I'm suffocating!"

"Got your mute in your pocket, son?"

"Yes, ma; for God's sake, yes! Yes! Don't keep asking things!"

"Ain't you ashamed, Leon, to be in such an excitement! For every concert you get worse."

"The chairs—they'll breathe on my neck."

"Leon, did mamma promise you those chairs would be moved?"

"Where's Hancock?"

"Say—I'm grateful if he stays out. It took me enough work to get this room cleared. You know your papa how he likes to drag in the whole world to show you off—always just before you play. The minute he walks in the room right away he gets everybody to trembling just from his own excitements. I dare him this time he should bring people. No dignity has that man got, the way he brings every one."

Even upon her words came a rattling of door, of door-knob, and a voice through the clamor.

"Open—quick—Sarah! Leon!"

A stiffening raced over Mrs. Kantor, so that she sat rigid on her chair-edge, lips compressed, eye darkly upon the shivering door.

"Open—Sarah!"

With a narrowing glance, Mrs. Kantor laid to her lips a forefinger of silence.

"Sarah, it's me! Quick, I say!"

Then Leon Kantor sprang up, the old prehensile gesture of curving fingers shooting up.

"For God's sake, ma, let him in! I can't stand that infernal battering."

"Abrahm, go away! Leon's got to have quiet before his concert."

"Just a minute, Sarah. Open quick!"

With a spring his son was at the door, unlocking and flinging it back.

"Come in, pa."

The years had weighed heavily upon Abrahm Kantor in avoirdupois only. He was himself plus eighteen years, fifty pounds, and a new sleek pomposity that was absolutely oleaginous. It shone roundly in his face, doubling of chin, in the bulge of waistcoat, heavily gold-chained, and in eyes that behind the gold-rimmed glasses gave sparklingly forth his estate of well-being.

"Abrahm, didn't I tell you not to dare to—"

On excited balls of feet that fairly bounced him, Abrahm Kantor burst in.

"Leon—mamma—I got out here an old friend—Sol Ginsberg. You remember, mamma, from brasses—"

"Abrahm—not now—"

"Go 'way with your 'not now'! I want Leon should meet him. Sol, this is him—a little grown up from such a *nebich* like you remember him—*nu?*

Sarah, you remember Sol Ginsberg? Say—I should ask you if you remember your right hand! Ginsberg & Esel, the firm. This is his girl, a five years' contract signed yesterday—five hundred dollars an opera for a beginner—six rôles—not bad—*nu?*"

"Abrahm, you must ask Mr. Ginsberg please to excuse Leon until after his concert—"

"Shake hands with him, Ginsberg. He's had his hand shook enough in his life, and by kings, to shake it once more with an old bouncer like you!"

Mr. Ginsberg, not unlike his colleague in rotundities, held out a short, a dimpled hand.

"It's a proud day," he said, "for me to shake the hands from mine old friend's son and the finest violinist livink to-day. My little daughter—"

"Yes, yes, Gina. Here, shake hands with him. Leon, they say a voice like a fountain. Gina Berg—eh, Ginsberg—is how you stage-named her? You hear, mamma, how fancy—Gina Berg? We go hear her, eh?"

There was about Miss Gina Berg, whose voice could soar to the tirra-lirra of a lark and then deepen to mezzo, something of the actual slimness of the poor, maligned Elsa so long buried beneath the buxomness of divas. She was like a little flower that in its crannied nook keeps dewy longest.

"How do you do, Leon Kantor?"

There was a whir through her English of three acquired languages.

"How do *you* do?"

"We—father and I—traveled once all the way from Brussels to Dresden to hear you. It was

worth it. I shall never forget how you played the 'Humoresque.' It made me laugh and cry."

"You like Brussels?"

She laid her little hand to her heart, half closing her eyes.

"I will never be so happy again as with the sweet little people of Brussels."

"I, too, love Brussels. I studied there four years with Ahrenfest."

"I know you did. My teacher, Lyndahl, in Berlin, was his brother-in-law."

"You have studied with Lyndahl?"

"He is my master."

"I— Will I some time hear you sing?"

"I am not yet great. When I am foremost like you, yes."

"Gina—Gina Berg; that is a beautiful name to make famous."

"You see how it is done? Gins—berg. Gina Berg."

"Clev—er!"

They stood then smiling across a chasm of the diffidence of youth, she fumbling at the great fur pelt out of which her face flowered so dewily.

"I— Well—we—we—are in the fourth box— I guess we had better be going— Fourth box, left."

He wanted to find words, but for consciousness of self, could not.

"It's a wonderful house out there waiting for you, Leon Kantor, and you—you're wonderful, too!"

"The—flowers—thanks!"

"My father, he sent them. Come, father—quick!"

Suddenly there was a tight tensity seemed to crowd up the little room.

"Abrahm—quick—get Hancock. That first row of chairs—has got to be moved. There he is, in the wings. See that the piano ain't dragged down too far! Leon, got your mute in your pocket? Please, Mr. Ginsberg—you must excuse— Here, Leon, is your glass of water; drink it, I say. Shut that door out there, boy, so there ain't a draught in the wings. Here, Leon, your violin. Got your neckerchief? Listen how they're shouting! It's for you—Leon—darlink— Go!"

The center of that vast human bowl which had shouted itself out, slim, boylike, and in his supreme isolation, Leon Kantor drew bow and a first thin, pellucid, and perfect note into a silence breathless to receive it.

Throughout the arduous flexuosities of the Mendelssohn E minor concerto, singing, winding from tonal to tonal climax, and out of the slow movement which is like a tourniquet twisting the heart into the spirited *allegro molto vivace*, it was as if beneath Leon Kantor's fingers the strings were living veincords, youth, vitality, and the very foam of exuberance racing through them.

That was the power of him. The vichy and the sparkle of youth, so that, playing, the melody poured round him like wine and went down seething and singing into the hearts of his hearers.

Later, and because these were his people and because they were dark and Slavic with his Slavic darkness, he played, as if his very blood were weeping,

the "Kol Nidre," which is the prayer of his race for atonement.

And then the super-amphitheater, filled with those whose emotions lie next to the surface and whose pores have not been closed over with a water-tight veneer, burst into its cheers and its tears.

There were fifteen recalls from the wings, Abrahm Kantor standing counting them off on his fingers and trembling to receive the Stradivarius. Then, finally, and against the frantic negative pantomime of his manager, a scherzo, played so lacily that it swept the house in lightest laughter.

When Leon Kantor finally completed his program they were loath to let him go, crowding down the aisles upon him, applauding up, down, around him until the great disheveled house was like the roaring of a sea, and he would laugh and throw out his arm in widespread helplessness, and always his manager in the background gesticulating against too much of his precious product for the money, ushers already slamming up chairs, his father's arms out for the Stradivarius, and, deepest in the gloom of the wings, Sarah Kantor, in a rocker especially dragged out for her, and from the depths of the black-silk reticule, darning his socks.

"Bravo — bravo! Give us the 'Humoresque' —Chopin Nocturne — Polonaise — 'Humoresque.' Bravo—bravo!"

And even as they stood, hatted and coated, importuning and pressing in upon him, and with a wisp of a smile to the fourth left box, Leon Kantor played them the "Humoresque" of Dvorák, skedaddling,

plucking, quirking—that laugh on life with a tear behind it. Then suddenly, because he could escape no other way, rushed straight back for his dressing-room, bursting in upon a flood of family already there: Isadore Kantor, blue-shaved, aquiline, and already graying at the temples; his five-year-old son, Leon; a soft little pouter-pigeon of a wife, too, enormous of bust, in glittering ear-drops and a wrist watch of diamonds half buried in chubby wrist; Miss Esther Kantor, pink and pretty; Rudolph; Boris, not yet done with growing-pains.

At the door Miss Kantor met her brother, her eyes as sweetly moist as her kiss.

"Leon darling, you surpassed even yourself!"

"Quit crowding, children. Let him sit down. Here, Leon, let mamma give you a fresh collar. Look how the child's perspired. Pull down that window, Boris. Rudolph, don't let no one in. I give you my word if to-night wasn't as near as I ever came to seeing a house go crazy. Not even that time in Milan, darlink, when they broke down the doors, was it like to-night—"

"Ought to seen, ma, the row of police outside—"

"Hush up, Roody! Don't you see your brother is trying to get his breath?"

From Mrs. Isadore Kantor: "You should have seen the balconies, mother. Isadore and I went up just to see the jam."

"Six thousand dollars in the house to-night, if there was a cent," said Isadore Kantor.

"Hand me my violin, please, Esther. I must have scratched it, the way they pushed."

"No, son, you didn't. I've already rubbed it up. Sit quiet, darlink!"

He was limply white, as if the vitality had flowed out of him.

"God! wasn't it—tremendous?"

"Six thousand, if there was a cent," repeated Isadore Kantor. "More than Rimsky ever played to in his life!"

"Oh, Izzie, you make me sick, always counting—counting!"

"Your sister's right, Isadore. You got nothing to complain of if there was only six hundred in the house. A boy whose fiddle has made already enough to set you up in such a fine business, his brother Boris in such a fine college, automobiles—style—and now because Vladimir Rimsky, three times his age, gets signed up with Elsass for a few thousand more a year, right away the family gets a long face—"

"Ma, please! Isadore didn't mean it that way!"

"Pa's knocking, ma! Shall I let him in?"

"Let him in, Roody. I'd like to know what good it will do to try to keep him out."

In an actual rain of perspiration, his tie slid well under one ear, Abrahm Kantor burst in, mouthing the words before his acute state of strangulation would let them out.

"Elsass—it's Elsass outside! He—wants—to sign—Leon—fifty concerts—coast to coast—two thousand—next season! He's got the papers—already drawn up—the pen outside waiting—"

"Abrahm!"

"Pa!"

In the silence that followed, Isadore Kantor, a poppiness of stare and a violent redness set in, suddenly turned to his five-year-old son, sticky with lollipop, and came down soundly and with smack against the infantile, the slightly outstanding and unsuspecting ear.

"*Momser!*" he cried. "*Chammer! Lump! Ganef!* You hear that? Two thousand! Two thousand! Didn't I tell you—didn't I tell you to practise?"

Even as Leon Kantor put pen to this princely document, Franz Ferdinand of Serbia, the assassin's bullet cold, lay dead in state, and let slip were the dogs of war.

In the next years, men, forty deep, were to die in piles; hayricks of fields to become human hayricks of battle-fields; Belgium disemboweled, her very entrails dragging, to find all the civilized world her champion, and between the poppies of Flanders, crosses, thousand upon thousand of them, to mark the places where the youth of her allies fell, avenging outrage. Seas, even when calmest, were to become terrible, and men's heart-beats, a bit sluggish with the fatty degeneration of a sluggard peace, to quicken and then to throb with the rat-a-tat-tat, the rat-a-tat-tat of the most peremptory, the most reverberating call to arms in the history of the world.

In June, 1917, Leon Kantor, answering that rat-a-tat-tat, enlisted.

In November, honed by the interim of training to even a new leanness, and sailing-orders heavy and light in his heart, Lieutenant Kantor, on two days'

home-leave, took leave of home, which can be cruelest when it is tenderest.

Standing there in the expensive, the formal, the enormous French parlor of his up-town apartment de luxe, from not one of whose chairs would his mother's feet touch floor, a wall of living flesh, mortared in blood, was throbbing and hedging him in.

He would pace up and down the long room, heavy with the faces of those who mourn, with a laugh too ready, too facetious, in his fear for them.

"Well, well, what is this, anyway, a wake? Where's the coffin? Who's dead?"

His sister-in-law shot out her plump, watch-encrusted wrist. "Don't, Leon!" she cried. "Such talk is a sin! It might come true."

"Rosie-posy-butter-ball," he said, pausing beside her chair to pinch her deeply soft cheek. "Cry-baby-roly-poly, you can't shove me off in a wooden kimono that way."

From his place before the white-and-gold mantel, staring steadfastly at the floor tiling, Isadore Kantor turned suddenly, a bit whiter and older at the temples.

"I don't get your comedy, Leon."

"'Wooden kimono'—Leon?"

"That's the way the fellows at camp joke about coffins, ma. I didn't mean anything but fun! Great Scott! Can't any one take a joke!"

"O God! O God!" His mother fell to swaying softly, hugging herself against shivering.

"Did you sign over power of attorney to pa, Leon?"

"All fixed, Izzie."

"I'm so afraid, son, you don't take with you enough money in your pockets. You know how you lose it. If only you would let mamma sew that little bag inside your uniform with a little place for bills and a little place for the asafœtida!"

"Now, please, ma—please! If I needed more, wouldn't I take it? Wouldn't I be a pretty joke among the fellows, tied up in that smelling stuff! Orders are orders, ma. I know what to take and what not to take."

"Please, Leon, don't get mad at me, but if you will let me put in your suit-case just one little box of that salve, for your finger-tips, so they don't crack—"

Pausing as he paced to lay cheek to her hair, he patted her. "Three boxes, if you want. Now, how's that?"

"And you won't take it out so soon as my back is turned?"

"Cross my heart."

His touch seemed to set her trembling again, all her illy concealed emotions rushing up. "I can't stand it! Can't! Can't! Take my life—take my blood, but don't take my boy—don't take my boy—"

"Mamma, mamma, is that the way you're going to begin all over again, after your promise?"

She clung to him, heaving against the rising storm of sobs. "I can't help it—can't! Cut out my heart from me, but let me keep my boy — my wonder-boy—"

"Oughtn't she be ashamed of herself? Just listen to her, Esther! What will we do with her? Talks like she had a guarantee I wasn't coming back. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if by spring I wasn't tuning up again for a coast-to-coast tour—"

"Spring! That talk don't fool me. Without my boy, the springs in my life are over—"

"Why, ma, you talk like every soldier who goes to war was killed! There's only the smallest percentage of them die in battle—"

"'Spring,' he says; 'spring'! Crossing the seas from me! To live through months with that sea between us—my boy maybe shot—my—"

"Mamma, please!"

"I can't help it, Leon; I'm not one of those fine mothers that can be so brave. Cut out my heart, but leave my boy! My wonder-boy—my child I prayed for!"

"There's other mothers, ma, with sons!"

"Yes, but not wonder-sons! A genius like you could so easy get excused, Leon. Give it up. Genius it should be the last to be sent to—the slaughter-pen. Leon darlink—don't go!"

"Ma, ma—you don't mean what you're saying. You wouldn't want me to reason that way! You wouldn't want me to hide behind my—violin."

"I would! Would! You should wait for the draft. With my Roody and even my baby Boris enlisted, ain't it enough for one mother? Since they got to be in camp, all right, I say, let them be there, if my heart breaks for it, but not my wonder-child! You can get exemption, Leon, right away for the

asking. Stay with me, Leon! Don't go away! The people at home got to be kept happy with music. That's being a soldier, too, playing their troubles away. Stay with me, Leon! Don't go leave me—don't—don't—"

He suffered her to lie, tear-drenched, back into his arms, holding her close in his compassion for her, his own face twisting.

"God! ma, this — this is awful! Please — you make us ashamed—all of us! I don't know what to say. Esther, come quiet her—for God's sake quiet her!"

From her place in that sobbing circle Esther Kantor crossed to kneel beside her mother.

"Mamma darling, you're killing yourself. What if every family went on this way? You want papa to come in and find us all crying? Is this the way you want Leon to spend his last hour with us—"

"Oh, God—God!"

"I mean his last hour until he comes back, darling. Didn't you just hear him say, darling, it may be by spring?"

"'Spring'—'spring'—never no more springs for me—"

"Just think, darling, how proud we should be! Our Leon, who could so easily have been excused, not even to wait for the draft."

"It's not too late yet—please—Leon—"

"Our Roody and Boris both in camp, too, training to serve their country. Why, mamma, we ought to be crying for happiness. As Leon says, surely the Kantor family, who fled out of Russia to escape

massacre, should know how terrible slavery can be. That's why we must help our boys, mamma, in their fight to make the world free! Right, Leon?" trying to smile with her red-rimmed eyes.

"We've got no fight with no one! Not a child of mine was ever raised to so much as lift a finger against no one. We've got no fight with no one!"

"We have got a fight with some one! With autocracy! Only this time it happens to be Hunnish autocracy. You should know it, mamma—oh, you should know it deeper down in you than any of us, the fight our family right here has got with autocracy! We should be the first to want to avenge Belgium!"

"Leon's right, mamma darling, the way you and papa were beaten out of your country—"

"There's not a day in your life you don't curse it without knowing it! Every time we three boys look at your son and our brother Mannie, born an —an imbecile—because of autocracy, we know what we're fighting for. We know. You know, too. Look at him over there, even before he was born, ruined by autocracy! Know what I'm fighting for? Why, this whole family knows! What's music, what's art, what's life itself in a world without freedom? Every time, ma, you get to thinking we've got a fight with no one, all you have to do is look at our poor Mannie. He's the answer. He's the answer."

In a foaming sort of silence, Mannie Kantor smiled softly from his chair beneath the pink-and-gold shade of the piano-lamp. The heterogeneous

sounds of women weeping had ceased. Straight in her chair, her great shelf of bust heaving, sat Rosa Kantor, suddenly dry of eye; Isadore Kantor head up. Erect now, and out from the embrace of her daughter, Sarah looked up at her son.

"What time do you leave, Leon?" she asked, actually firm of lip.

"Any minute, ma. Getting late."

This time she pulled her lips to a smile, waggling her forefinger.

"Don't let them little devils of French girls fall in love with my dude in his uniform."

Her pretense at pleasantry was almost more than he could bear.

"Hear! Hear! Our mother thinks I'm a regular lady-killer! Hear that, Esther?" pinching her cheek.

"You are, Leon—only—only, you don't know it!"

"Don't you bring down too many beaux while I'm gone, either, Miss Kantor!"

"I—won't, Leon."

Sotto voce to her: "Remember, Esther, while I'm gone, the royalties from the discaphone records are yours. I want you to have them for pin-money and —maybe a dowry?"

She turned from him. "Don't, Leon—don't—"

"I like him! Nice fellow, but too slow! Why, if I were in his shoes I'd have popped long ago."

She smiled with her lashes dewy.

There entered then, in a violet-scented little whirl, Miss Gina Berg, rosy with the sting of a winter's night, and, as usual, swathed in the high-napped furs.

"Gina!"

She was for greeting every one, a wafted kiss to Mrs. Kantor, and then, arms wide, a great bunch of violets in one outstretched hand, her glance straight, sure, and sparkling for Leon Kantor.

"Surprise—everybody—surprise!"

"Why, Gina—we read—we thought you were singing in Philadelphia to-night!"

"So did I, Esther darling, until a little bird whispered to me that Lieutenant Kantor was home on farewell leave."

He advanced to her down the great length of room, lowering his head over her hand, his puttee-clad legs clicking together. "You mean, Miss Gina—Gina—you didn't sing?"

"Of course I didn't! Hasn't every prima donna a larynx to hide behind?" She lifted off her fur cap, spilling curls.

"Well, I—I'll be hanged!" said Lieutenant Kantor, his eyes lakes of her reflected loveliness.

She let her hand linger in his. "Leon—you—really going? How—terrible! How—how—wonderful!"

"How wonderful—your coming!"

"I— You think it was not nice of me—to come?"

"I think it was the nicest thing that ever happened in the world."

"All the way here in the train I kept saying, 'Crazy—crazy—running to tell Leon—Lieutenant—Kantor good-by—when you haven't even seen him three times in three years—' "

"But each—each of those three times we—we've remembered, Gina."

"But that's how I feel toward all the boys, Leon—

our fighting boys—just like flying to them to kiss them each one good-by."

"Come over, Gina. You'll be a treat to our mother. I— Well, I'm hanged! All the way from Philadelphia!"

There was even a sparkle to talk, then, and a let-up of pressure. After a while Sarah Kantor looked up at her son, tremulous, but smiling.

"Well, son, you going to play—for your old mother before—you go? It 'll be many a month —spring—maybe longer, before I hear my boy again except on the discaphone."

He shot a quick glance to his sister. "Why, I—I don't know. I—I'd love it, ma, if—if you think, Esther, I'd better."

"You don't need to be afraid of me, darlink. There's nothing can give me the strength to bear—what's before me like—like my boy's music. That's my life, his music."

"Why, yes; if mamma is sure she feels that way, play for us, Leon."

He was already at the instrument, where it lay, swathed, atop the grand piano. "What 'll it be, folks?"

"Something to make ma laugh, Leon—something light, something funny."

"'Humoresque,'" he said, with a quick glance for Miss Berg.

"'Humoresque,'" she said, smiling back at him.

He capered through, cutting and playful of bow, the melody of Dvorák's, which is as ironic as a grinning mask.

Finished, he smiled at his parent, her face still untearful.

"How's that?"

She nodded. "It's like life, son, that piece. Crying to hide its laughing and laughing to hide its crying."

"Play that new piece, Leon—the one you set to music. You know. The words by that young boy in the war who wrote such grand poetry before he was killed. The one that always makes poor Mannie laugh. Play it for him, Leon."

Her plump little unlined face innocent of fault, Mrs. Isadore Kantor ventured her request, her smile tired with tears.

"No, no—Rosa—not now! Ma wouldn't want that!"

"I do, son; I do! Even Mannie should have his share of good-by."

To Gina Berg: "They want me to play that little arrangement of mine from Allan Seegar's poem. 'I Have a Rendezvous . . . .'"

"It—it's beautiful, Leon. I was to have sung it on my program to-night—only, I'm afraid you had better not—here—now—"

"Please, Leon! Nothing you play can ever make me as sad as it makes me glad. Mannie should have, too, his good-by."

"All right, then, ma, if—if you're sure you want it. Will you sing it, Gina?"

She had risen. "Why, yes, Leon."

She sang it then, quite purely, her hands clasped simply together and her glance mistily off, the

beautiful, the heroic, the lyrical prophecy of a soldier-poet and a poet-soldier:

> "But I've a rendezvous with Death
> On some scarred slope of battered hill,
> When spring comes round again this year
> And the first meadow-flowers appear."

In the silence that followed, a sob burst out, stifled, from Esther Kantor, this time her mother holding her in arms that were strong.

"That, Leon, is the most beautiful of all your compositions. What does it mean, son, that word, 'rondy-voo'?"

"Why, I—I don't exactly know. A rendezvous—it's a sort of meeting, an engagement, isn't it, Miss Gina? Gina? You're up on languages. As if I had an appointment to meet you some place—at the opera-house, for instance."

"That's it, Leon—an engagement."

"Have I an engagement with you, Gina?"

She let her lids droop. "Oh, how—how I hope you have, Leon."

"When?"

"In the spring?"

"That's it—in the spring."

Then they smiled, these two, who had never felt more than the merest butterfly wings of love brushing them, light as lashes. No word between them, only an unfinished sweetness, waiting to be linked up.

Suddenly there burst in Abrahm Kantor, in a carefully rehearsed gale of bluster.

"Quick, Leon! I got the car down-stairs. Just fifteen minutes to make the ferry. Quick! The sooner we get him over there the sooner we get him back! I'm right, mamma? Now, now! No water-works! Get your brother's suit-case, Isadore. Now, now! No nonsense! Quick—quick—"

With a deftly manœuvered round of good-bys, a grip-laden dash for the door, a throbbing moment of turning back when it seemed as though Sarah Kantor's arms could not unlock their deadlock of him, Leon Kantor was out and gone, the group of faces point-etched into the silence behind him.

The poor, mute face of Mannie, laughing softly. Rosa Kantor crying into her hands. Esther, grief-crumpled, but rich in the enormous hope of youth. The sweet Gina, to whom the waiting months had already begun their reality.

Not so Sarah Kantor. In a bedroom adjoining, its high-ceilinged vastness as cold as a cathedral to her lowness of stature, sobs dry and terrible were rumbling up from her, only to dash against lips tightly restraining them.

On her knees beside a chest of drawers, and unwrapping it from swaddling-clothes, she withdrew what at best had been a sorry sort of fiddle.

Cracked of back and solitary of string, it was as if her trembling arms, raising it above her head, would make of themselves and her swaying body the tripod of an altar.

The old twisting and prophetic pain was behind her heart. Like the painted billows of music that

the old Italian masters loved to do, there wound and wreathed about her clouds of song:

> But I've a rendezvous with Death
> On some scarred slope of battered hill,
> When spring comes round again this year
> And the first meadow-flowers appear.

OATS FOR THE WOMAN

THAT women who toil not neither do they spin might know the feel of fabrics so cunningly devised that they lay to the flesh like the inner petals of buds, three hundred and fifty men, women, and children contrived, between strikes, to make the show-rooms of the Kessler Costume Company, Incorporated, a sort of mauve and mirrored Delphi where buyers from twenty states came to invoke forecast of the mood of skirts, the caprice of sleeves, and the rumored flip to the train. Before these flips and moods, a gigantic industry held semi-annual pause, destinies of lace-factories trembling before a threatened season of strictly tailor-mades, velvet-looms slowing at the shush of taffeta. When woman would be sleazy, petticoat manufacturers went overnight into an oblivion from which there might or might not be returning. The willow plume waved its day, making and unmaking merchants.

Destiny loves thus to spring from acorn beginnings. Helen smiled, and Troy fell. Roast pork, and I doubt not then and there the apple sauce, became a national institution because a small boy burnt his fingers.

That is why, out from the frail love of women for the flesh and its humors, and because for the webby cling of chiffon too often no price is too high, the Kessler Costume Company employed, on the factory side of the door, the three hundred and fifty sewers and cutters, not one of whose monthly wage could half buy the real-lace fichu or the painted-chiffon frock of his own handiwork.

On the show-room side of the door, painted mauve within and not without, *mannequins*, so pink finger-tipped, so tilted of instep, and so bred in the thrust to the silhouette, trailed these sleazy products of thick fingers across mauve-colored carpet and before the appraising eyes of twenty states.

Often as not, smoke rose in that room from the black cigar of the Omaha Store, Omaha, or Ladies' Wear, Cleveland. In season, and particularly during the frenzied dog-days of August, when the fate of the new waist-line or his daring treatment of cloth of silver hung yet in the balance, and the spirit of Detroit must be browbeaten by the dictum of the sleeveless thing in evening frocks, Leon Kessler himself smoked a day-long chain of cigarettes, lighting one off the other.

In the model-room, a long, narrow slit, roaringly ventilated by a whirling machine, lined in frocks suspended from hangers, and just wide enough for two very perfect thirty-sixes to stand abreast, August fell heavily. So heavily that occasionally a cloak-model, her lot to show next December's conceit in theater wraps, fainted on the show-dais; or a cloth-of-gold evening gown, donned for the twentieth

time that sweltering day, would suddenly, with its model, crumple, a glittering huddle, to the floor.

Upon Miss Hattie Becker, who within the narrow slit had endured eight of these Augusts with only two casual faints and a swoon or two nipped in the bud, this ninth August came in so furiously that, sliding out of her sixth showing of a cloth-of-silver and blue-fox opera wrap, a shivering that amounted practically to chill took hold of her.

"Br-r-r!" she said, full of all men's awe at the carbon-dioxide paradox. "I'm so hot I'm cold!"

Miss Clarice Delehanty slid out of a shower of tulle-of-gold dancing-frock and into an Avenue gown of rough serge. The tail of a very arched eyebrow threatened, and then ran down in a black rill.

> "If Niagara Falls was claret lemonade,
> You'd see me beat it to a watery grave.

"That 'll be enough canary-talk out of you, Clare. Hand me my shirt-waist there off the hook."

"Didn't Kess say we had to show Keokuk the line before lunch?"

"If the King of England was buying ermine sport coats this morning, I wouldn't show 'em before I had a cold cut and a long drink in me. Hurry! Hand me my waist, Clare, before the girls come in from showing the bridesmaid line."

Miss Delehanty flung the garment down the narrow length of the room.

"Minneapolis don't know it, but after this showing he's going to blow me to the frappiest little lunch on the Waldorf roof."

Miss Becker buttoned her flimsy blouse with three pearl beads down its front, wiping constantly at a constantly dampening brow.

"You'd shove over the Goddess of Liberty if you thought she had her foot on a meal ticket."

"Yes; and if I busted her, you could build a new one on the lunch money you've saved in your time."

"Waldorf! You've got a fine chance with Minneapolis. You mean the Automat, and two spoons for the ice-cream."

Miss Delehanty adjusted a highly eccentric hat, a small green velvet, outrageously tilted off the rear of its *bandeau*, and a wide black streamer flowing down over one shoulder. It was the match to the explosive effect of the *trotteur* gown. She was Fashion's humoresque, except that Fashion has no sense of humor. Very presently Minneapolis would appraise her at two hundred and seventy-five as is. Miss Delehanty herself came cheaper.

"Say, Hattie, don't let being an old man's darling go to your head. The grandchildren may issue an injunction."

A flare of crimson rushed immediately over Miss Becker's face, spreading down into her neck.

"You let him alone! He's a darn sight better than anything I've seen you girls picking for yourselves. You never met a man in your life whose name wasn't Johnnie. You couldn't land a John in a million years."

Miss Delehanty raised her face from over a shoe-buckle. A stare began to set in, as obviously innocent as a small boy's between spitballs.

"Well, who said anything about old St. Louis, I'd like to know?"

"You did, and you leave him alone! What do you know about a real man? You'd pass up a Ford ride to sit still in a pasteboard limousine every time!"

"Well, of all things! Did I say anything?"

"Yes, you did!"

"Why, for my part, he can show you a good time eight nights in the week and Sundays, too."

"He 'ain't got grandchildren—if you want to know it."

"Did I say he had?"

"Yes, you did!"

"Why, I don't blame any girl for showing grandpa a good time."

"You could consider yourself darn lucky, Clarice Delehanty, if one half as good ever—"

"Ask the girls if I don't always say old St. Louis is all to the good. Three or four years ago, right after his wife died, I said to Ada, I said—"

A head showed suddenly through the lining side of the mauve portières, blue-eyed, blue-shaved, and with a triple ripple of black hair trained backward.

"Hurry along there with fifty-seven, Delehanty! Heyman's got to see the line and catch that six-two Chicago flier."

Miss Delehanty fell into pose, her profile turned back over one shoulder.

"Tell him to chew a clove; it's good for breathless haste," she said, disappearing through portières into the show-room.

Miss Becker thrust herself from a hastily-found-out aperture, patting, with final touch, her belt into place.

"Have I been asking you for five years, Kess, to knock before you poke your head in on us girls?"

Mr. Leon Kessler appeared then fully between the curtains, letting them drape heavily behind him. Gotham garbs her poets and her brokers, her employers and employees, in the national pin-stripes and sack coat. Except for a few pins stuck upright in his coat lapel, Mr. Kessler might have been his banker or his salesman. Typical New-Yorker is the pseudo, half enviously bestowed upon his kind by *hinter* America. It signifies a bi-weekly manicure, femininely administered; a hotel lobbyist who can outstare a seatless guest; the sang-froid to add up a dinner check; spats. When Mr. Kessler tipped, it did not clink; it rustled. In theater, at each interval between acts, he piled out over ladies' knees and returned chewing a mint. He journeyed twice a year to a famous Southern spa, and there won or lost his expenses. He regarded Miss Becker, peering at her around the fluff of a suspended frock of pink tulle.

"What's the idea, Becker? Keokuk wants to see you in the wrap line."

Miss Becker swallowed hard, jamming down and pinning into a small taffy-colored turban, her hair, the exact shade of it, escaping in scallops. Carefully powdered-out lines of her face seemed to emerge suddenly through the conserved creaminess of her skin. Thirty-four, in its unguarded moments, will out. Miss Becker had almost detained twenty's waist-

line and twenty-two's ardent thrust of face. It was only the indentures of time that had begun to tell slightly—indentures that powder could not putty out. There was a slight bagginess of throat where the years love to eat in first, and out from the eyes a spray of fine lines. It was these lines that came out now indubitably.

"If you want me to lay down on you, Kess, for sure, just ask me to show the line again before lunch. I'm about ready to keel. And you can't put me off again. I'm ready, and you got to come now."

He dug so deeply into his pockets that his sleeves crawled up.

"Say, look here. I've got my business to attend to, and, when my trade's in town, my trade comes first. See? Take off and show Keokuk a few numbers. I want him to see that chinchilla drape."

She reached out, closing her hand over his arm.

"I'll show him the whole line, Kess, when we're back from lunch. I got to talk to you, I tell you. You put me off yesterday and the day before, and this—this is the last."

"The last what?"

"Please, Kess, if you only run over to Rinehardt's with me. I got to tell you something. Something about me and—and—"

He regarded her in some perplexity. "Tell it to me here. Now!"

"I can't. The girls 'll be swarming in any minute. I can't get you anywheres but lunch. It's the first thirty minutes of your time I've asked in five years,

Kess—is that little enough? Let Cissie show Keokuk the blouses till we get back. It's something, Kess, I can't put off. Kess, please!"

Her face was so close to him and so eager that he turned to back out.

"Wait for me at the Thirty-first Street entrance," he said, "and I'll shoot you across to Rinehardt's."

She caught up her small silk hand-bag and ran out toward the elevators. Down in Thirty-first Street a wave of heat met, almost overpowering her. New York, enervated from sleepless nights on fire-escapes and in bedrooms opening on areaways, moved through it at half-speed, hugging the narrow shade of buildings. Infant mortality climbed with the thermometer. In Fifth Avenue, cool, high bedrooms were boarded and empty. In First Avenue, babies lay naked on the floor, snuffing out for want of oxygen.

Across that man-made Grand Cañon men leap sometimes, but seldom. Mothers whose babies lie naked on the floor look out across it, damning.

Out into this flaying heat Miss Becker stepped gingerly, almost immediately rejoined by Mr. Leon Kessler, crowningly touched with the correct thing in straw sailors.

"Get a move on," he said, guiding her across the soft asphalt.

In Rinehardt's, one of a thousand such *Rathskeller* retreats designed for a city that loves to dine in fifteen languages, the noonday cortège of summer widowers had not yet arrived. Waiters moved through the dim, pink-lit gloom, dressing their

tables temptingly cool and white, dipping ice out from silver buckets into thin tumblers.

They seated themselves beneath a ceiling fan, Miss Becker's taffy-colored scallops stirring in the scurry of air.

"Lordy!" she said, closing her eyes and pressing her finger-tips against them, "I wish I could lease this spot for the summer!"

He pushed a menu-card toward her. "What'll you have? There's plenty under the 'ready to serve.'"

She peeled out of her white-silk gloves.

"Some cold cuts and a long ice-tea."

He ordered after her and more at length, then lighted a cigarette.

"Well?" he said, waving out a match.

She leaned forward, already designing with her fork on the table-cloth.

"Kess, can you guess?"

"Come on with it!"

"Have you—noticed anything?"

"Say, I'd have a sweet time keeping up with you girls!"

She looked at him now evenly between the eyes.

"You kept up with me pretty close for three years, didn't you?"

"Say, you knew what you were doing!"

"I—I'm not so sure of that by a long shot. I—I was fed up with the most devilish kind of promises there are. The kind you was too smart to put in words or—or in writing. You—you only looked 'em."

"I suppose you was kidnapped one dark and

stormy night while the villain pursued you, eh? Is that it?"

"Oh, what's the use—rehashing! After that time at Atlantic City and—and then the—flat, it—it just seemed the way I felt about you then—that nothing you wanted could be wrong. I guess I knew what I was doing all right, or, if I didn't, I ought to have. I was rotten—or I couldn't have done it, I guess. Only, deep inside of me I was waiting and banking on you like—like poor little Cissie is now. And you knew it; you knew it all them three years."

"Say, did you get me over here to—"

"I only hope to God when you're done with Cissie you'll—"

"You let me take care of my own affairs. If it comes right down to it, there's a few things I could tell you, girl, that ain't so easy to listen to. Let's get off the subject while the going's good."

"Oh, anybody that plays as safe as you—"

He raised his voice, shoving back his chair. "Well, if you want me to clear out of this place quicker than you can bat your eye, you just—"

"No, no, Kess! 'Sh-h-h-h!"

"If there ever was a girl in my place had a square deal, that girl's been you."

" 'Square deal!' Because after I held on and—ate out my heart for three years, you didn't—take away my job, too? Somebody ought to pin a Carnegie medal on you!"

"You've held down a twenty-dollar-a-week job season in and season out, when there've been times

it didn't even pay for the ink it took to write you on the pay-roll."

"There's nothing I ever got out of you I didn't earn three times over."

"A younger figure than yours is getting to be wouldn't hurt the line any, you know. It's because I make it a rule not to throw off the old girls when their waist-lines begin to spread that makes you so grateful, is it? There's not a firm in town keeps on a girl after she begins to heavy up. If you got to know why I took you off the dress line and put you in the wraps, it's because I seen you widening into a thirty-eight, and a darn poor one at that. I can sell two wraps off Cissie to one off you. You're getting hippy, girl, and, since you started the subject, you can be darn glad you know where your next week's salary's coming from."

She was reddening so furiously that even her ear-lobes, their tips escaping beneath the turban, were tinged.

"Maybe I—I'm getting hippy, Kess; but it'll take more than anything you can ever do for me to make up for—"

'Gad!" he said, flipping an ash in some disgust, "I wish I had a ten-cent piece for every one since!"

"Oh," she cried, her throat jerking, "you eat what you just said! You eat it, because you know it ain't so!"

"Now look here,"he said, straightening up suddenly, "I don't know what your game is, but if you're here to stir up the old dust that's been laid for five years—"

"No, no, Kess! It's only that—what I got to tell you—I—it makes a difference, I—"

"What?"

"There's nothing in these years since, I swear to God, or in the years before, that I got to be ashamed of!"

"All right! All right!"

"If ever a girl came all of a sudden to her senses, it was me. If ever a girl has lived a quiet life, picking herself up and brushing the dust off, it's been me. Oh, I don't say I 'ain't been entertained by the trade—I didn't dodge my job—but it's been a straight kind of a time—straight!"

"I'm not asking for an alibi, Becker. What's the idea?"

"Kess," she said, leaning forward, with tears popping out in her eyes, "I. W. Goldstone has asked me to marry him."

He laid down his roll in the act of buttering it, gazing across at her with his knife upright in his hand.

"Huh?"

"Night before last, Kess, in the poppy-room at Shalif's."

"Are you crazy?"

"It's the God's truth, Kess. He's begging me for an answer by to-night, before he goes back home."

"I. W. Goldstone, of Goldstone & Auer, ladies' wear?"

She nodded, her hand to her throat.

"Well, I'll be strung up!"

"He—he says, Kess, it's been on his mind for a

year and a half, ever since his spring trip a year ago. He wants to take me back with him, Kess, home."

"Whew!" said Mr. Kessler, wiping his brow and the back of his collar.

"You're no more surprised than me, Kess. I—I nearly fell off the Christmas tree."

"Good Lord! Why, his wife—he had her in the store it seems yesterday!"

"She's been dead four years and seven months, Kess."

"Old I. W. and you!"

"He's only fifty-two, Kess; I'm thirty-four."

"I. W. Goldstone!"

"I know it. I can't realize it, neither."

"Why, he's worth two hundred thousand, if he's worth a cent!"

"I know it, Kess."

"The old man's stringing you, girl. His kind stop, look, and listen."

"He's not stringing me! I tell you he's begging me to marry him and go back home with him. He's even told his—daughter about me."

"Good Lord—little Effie! I was out there once when she was a kid. Stopped off on my way to Hot Springs. They live in a kind of park—Forest Park Street or something or other. Why, I've done business with Goldstone & Auer for fifteen years, and my father before me! Good Lord!"

"What 'll I do, Kess?"

"So that's the size of the fish you went out and landed!"

"I didn't! I didn't! He's been asking me out

the last three trips, and post-cards in between, but I never thought nothing of it."

"Why, he can't get away with this!"

"Why?"

"They won't stand for it out in that Middle West town. He's the head of a big business. He's got a grown daughter."

"He's got her fixed, Kess—settled on her."

"Hattie Becker, Mrs. I. W. Goldstone! Gad! can you beat it? Can't you just see me, when I come out to St. Louis pretty soon, having dinner out at Mrs. I. W. Goldstone's house? Say, am I seeing things?"

"What 'll I do, Kess? What 'll I do?"

"I tell you that you can't get away with it, girl. The old man's getting childish; they'll have to have him restrained. Why, the woman he was married to for twenty years, Lenie Goldstone, never even seen a skirt-dance. I remember once he brought her to New York and then wouldn't let her see a cabaret show. He won't even buy sleeveless models for his French room."

"I tell you, Kess, he'll take me to Jersey to-morrow and marry me, if I give the word."

"Not a chance!"

"I tell you yes. That's why I got to see you. I got to tell him to-night, Kess. He — goes back to-morrow."

He regarded her slowly, watching her throat where it throbbed.

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"I—I don't know."

"Where do you stand with him? Sweet sixteen and never been kissed?"

"He—he don't ask questions, Kess. I—I'm his ideal, he says, of the—kind of—woman can take up for him where his wife left off. He says we're alike in everything but looks, and that a man who was happy in marriage like him can't be happy outside of it. He—he's sized up pretty well the way I live, and—and—he knows I don't expect too much out of life no more. Just a quiet kind of team-work, he puts it—pulling together fifty-fifty, and somebody's hand to hold on to when old fellow Time hits you a whack in the knees from behind. But he ain't old when he talks that way, Kess; he—he's beautiful to me."

"Does he wear a mask when he makes love?"

"He's got a fine face."

"So that's the way you're playing it, is it? Love-stuff?"

"Oh, I've had all the love-stuff knocked out of me. Three years of eating out my heart is about all the love-stuff I can handle for a while. He don't want that in a woman. I don't want it in him. He's just a plain, good man I never in my life could dream of having. A good home in a good town where life ain't like a red-eyed devil ready to hit in deep between the shoulder-blades. I know why he says he can see his wife in me. He knows I'm the kind was cut out for that kind of life—home and kitchen and my own parsley in my own back yard. He knows, if he marries me, carpet slippers seven nights in the week is my speed. I never want to see a

'roof,' or a music-show, or a cabaret again to the day I die. He knows I'll fit in home like a goldfish in its bowl. Life made a mistake with me, and it's going to square itself. It's fate, Kess; that's what it is—fate!"

She clapped her hands to her face, sobbing down into them.

He glanced about him in quick and nervous concern.

"Pull yourself together there, Becker; we're in a public place."

"If only I could go to him and tell him."

"Well, you can't."

"It's not you that keeps me. Only, I know that with his kind of man and at his age, a woman is—is one thing or another and that ends it. With a grown daughter, he wouldn't—couldn't—he's too set in his ways to know how it was with me—and—what 'll I do, Kess?"

"Say, I'm not going to stand in your light, if that's what's eating you. If you can get away with it, I don't wish you nothing but well. Looks to me like all right, if you want to make the try. I'll even come and break bread with you when I go out to see my Middle West trade pretty soon. That's the kind of a hairpin I am."

"It's like I keep saying to myself, Kess. If—if he'd ask me anything, it—it would be different. He—he says he never felt so satisfied that a woman had the right stuff in her. And I have! There's nothing in the world can take that away from me. I can give him what he wants. I know I can. Why,

the way I'll make up to that little girl out there and love her to death! I ask so little, Kess—just a decent life and rest—peace. I'm tired. I want to let myself get fat. I'm built that way, to get fat. It was nothing but diet gave me the anæmia last summer. He says he wants me to plump out. Perfect thirty-six don't mean nothing in his life except for the trade. No more rooming-houses with the kitchenette in the bath-room. A kitchen, he says, Kess, half the size of the show-room, with a butler's pantry. He likes to play pinochle at night, he says, next to the sitting-room fire. He tried to learn me the rules of the game the other night in the poppy-room. It's easy. His first wife was death on flowers. She used to train roses over their back fence. He loved to see her there. He wants me to like to grow them. He wants to take me back to a home of my own and peace, where life can't look to a girl like a devil with horns. He wants to take me home. What 'll I do, Kess? Please, please, what 'll I do?"

He was rather inarticulate, but reached out to pat her arm. "Go—to it—girl, and—God bless you!"

Forest Park Boulevard comes in sootily, smoke-stacks, gas-tanks, and large areas of scarred vacant lots boding ill enough for its destiny. But after a while, where Taylor Avenue bisects, it begins to retrieve itself. Here it is parked down its center, a narrow strip set out in shrubs, and on either side, traffic, thus divided, flows evenly up and down a macadamized roadway. In summer the shrubs thicken, half concealing one side of Forest Park

Boulevard from its other. Houses suddenly take on detached and architectural importance, often as not a gravel driveway dividing lawns, and out farther still, where the street eventually flows into Forest Park, the Italian Renaissance invades, somebody's rococo money's worth.

I. W. Goldstone's home, so near the park that, in spring, the smell of lilacs and gasolene hovers over it, pretends not to period or dynasty. Well detached, and so far back from the sidewalk that interlocking trees conceal its second-story windows, an alcove was frankly a bulge on its red-brick exterior. Where the third-floor bath-room, an afterthought, led off the hallway, it jutted out, a shingled protuberance on the left end of the house. A tower swelled out of its front end, and all year round geraniums and boxed climbing vines bloomed in its three stories.

Across a generous ledge of veranda, more vines grew quite furiously, reaching their height and then growing down upon themselves. Behind those vines, and so cunningly concealed by them that not even the white wrapper could flash through to the passer-by, Mrs. I. W. Goldstone, in a chair that would rock rhythmically with her, loved to sit in the first dusk of evening, pleasantly idle. A hose twirling on the lawn spun up the smell of green, abetted by similar whirlings down the wide vista of adjoining lawns. Occasionally, a prideful and shirt-sleeved landed proprietor wielded his own hose, flushing the parched sidewalk or shooting spray against hot bricks that drank in thirstily.

As Mrs. Goldstone rocked she smiled, tilting herself backward off the balls of her feet. The years had cropped out in her suddenly, surprisingly, and with a great deal of geniality. The taffy cast to her hair had backslid to ashes of roses. Uncorseted and in the white wrapper, she was quite frankly widespread, her hips fitting in tight between the chair-arms, and her knees wide.

A screen door snapped sharply shut on its spring, Mr. I. W. Goldstone emerging. There was a great rotundity to his silhouette, the generous outward curve to his waist-line giving to his figure a sway-back erectness, the legs receding rather short and thin from the bay of waistcoat.

"Hattie?"

"Here I am, I. W."

"I looped up the sweet-peas."

"Good!"

He sat down beside her, wide-kneed, too, the smooth top of his head and his shirt sleeves spots in the darkness.

"Get dressed a little, Hattie, and I'll get out the car and ride you out to Forest Park Highlands."

She slowed, but did not cease to rock.

"It's so grand at home this evening, I. W. I'm too comfortable to even dress myself."

He felt for her hand in the gloom; she put it out to him.

"You huck home too much, Hattie."

"I guess I do, honey; but it's like I can never get enough of it. The first year I was a home body, and the second and third year I'm two of 'em."

"That's something you'll never hear me complain of in a woman. There's a world of good in the woman who loves her home."

"It's not that, I. W. It's because I — I never dreamed that there was anything like this coming to me. To live around in rooms, year in and year out, in the lonesomest town in the world, and then, all of a sudden, a home of your own and a hubby of your own and a daughter of your own, why—I dunno—sometimes when I think of them days it's like life was a big red devil with horns and a tail that I'd got away from. Why, if it was to get me again, I—I dunno, honey, I dunno—I—just—dunno."

"You're a good woman, Hattie, and you deserve all that's coming to you. I wish it was more."

"And you're a good man—they don't come no better."

"I'm satisfied with my bargain."

"And me with mine, honey, if — if you don't mind the talk."

"S-ay, this town would talk if you cut its tongue out."

"You're my nice old hubby!"

"If I ever was a little uneasy it was in the beginning, Hattie—the girl—those things don't always turn out."

"It's her as much as me, I. W. She's the sweetest little thing."

"Never seen the like the way you took hold, though. I'll bet there's not one woman in a hundred could have worked it out easier."

"That's right—kid me to death."

"'Kid,' she says, the minute I tell her the truth."

"Put on your cap, I. W.; it's getting damp."

He felt under the chair-cushions, drawing out and adjusting a black skull-cap.

"Want to go to the picture-show awhile, Hattie?"

"No. When Lizzie's done the dishes, I want to set some dough."

"Let's walk, then, a little. I ate too much supper."

"Just in the side yard, I. W. It's a shame the way I don't dress evenings."

"S-ay, in your own home, shouldn't you have your own comfort? You can take it from me, Hattie, no matter what Effie tells you, you're twice the looking woman with some skin on your bones. I want my wife when she sits down to table she should not look blue-faced when the gravy is passed. Maybe it's not the style, but if it suits your old man, we should worry who else it suits."

"It's not right, I. W., but I love it—this feeling at home for—for good." She rose out of the low mound she had made in the chair, tucking up the white wrapper at both sides. "Come; let's walk in the side yard."

A narrow strip of asphalt ran across the house-frontage, turning in a generous elbow and then back the depth of the lot. They paced it quietly in the gloom, arm in arm, and their voices under darkness.

"Next month is my New York trip. All of a sudden Effie begs I should take her. We'll all go. What you say, Hattie? It 'll do us good."

"You take the kid, I. W. Lizzie needs watching.

Yesterday I had to make her do the whole butler's pantry over. She just naturally ain't clean."

"You got such luck with your roses, Hattie; it's wonderful!"

They were beneath a climbing bush of them that ran along, glorifying a wooden fence.

She pulled a fan of them to her face. "M-m-m-m!"

"I must spray for worms to-morrow," he said.

They resumed their soft walking in the gloom. "Where's Effie?"

"Telephoning."

"I ask you, is it a shame a child should hang on to the telephone an hour at a time? Fifty minutes since she was interrupted from supper she's been there."

"What's the harm in a young girl telephoning, I. W.? All young folks like to gad over the wire."

"What can a girl have to say over the telephone for fifty minutes? Altogether in my life I never talked that long into the telephone."

"Let the child alone, I. W."

"Who can she get to listen to her for fifty minutes?"

"Birdie Harberger usually calls up at this time."

"Always at supper-time! Never in my life has that child sat down at the table it don't ring in our faces. The next time what it happens you can take sides with her all you want, not one step does she move till she's finished with her supper."

"As easy with her as you are, I. W., just as unreasonable you can get."

"On the stairs-landing for an hour a child should

giggle into the telephone! I'm ashamed for the operators. You take sides with her yet."

"I don't, I. W.; only—"

"You do!"

A patch of light from an upper window sprang then across their path.

"She's in her room now, I. W.!" cried Mrs. Goldstone. "She hasn't been telephoning all this time at all. Now, crosspatch!"

"You know much! Can't you see she just lit up? Effie!"

A voice came down to them, clear and with a quality to it like the ring of thin glass.

"Coming, pop!"

The light flashed out again, and in a length of time that could only have meant three steps at a bound she was around the elbow of the asphalt walk, a coat dangling off one arm, her summery skirts flying backward and her head ardently forward.

"You'll never guess!"

She flung herself between the two of them, linking into each of their elbows.

"By my watch, Effie, fifty minutes! If it happens again that you get rung up supper-time, I—"

"It was Leon Kessler, pop; he didn't leave on the six-two. Can you beat it? Down at the station he got to thinking of me and turned back. Oh, my golly! how the boys love me!"

She was jumping now on the tips of her toes, her black curls bouncing.

"You don't tell me!" said Mr. Goldstone. "To-

day in the store he says he must be back in New York by Monday morning."

She thrust her face outward, its pink-and-white vividness very close to his.

"Is my daddy's daughter going out in a seventy horse-power to Delmar Garden? She is!"

"Them New York boys spend too much money on the girls when they come. They spoil them for the home young men."

"Can I help it if he couldn't tear himself away?"

"S-ay, don't fool yourself! I said to him to-day he should stay over Sunday. After the bill of goods I bought from him this morning, and the way he only comes out to see his trade once in five or six years, he should stay and mix with them a little longer. That fellow knows good business."

She turned her face with a fling of curls to the right of her, linking closer into the soft arm there.

"Listen to him, Mamma Hat! Let's shove a brick house over on him."

When Mrs. Goldstone finally spoke there was a depth to her voice that seemed to create sudden quiet.

"Effie, Effie, why didn't you let him go?"

"Let him? Did I tie any strings to him? I said good-by to him in the store this afternoon. Can I help it that the boys love me? Why didn't I let him go, she says!"

Her father pinched her slyly at that. "*Echta* fresh kid," he said.

To her right, the hand at her arm clung closer.

"Effie, you—you're so young, honey. Leon Kessler's an old-timer—"

"I hate kids. Give me a *man* every time. I like them when they've got enough sense to—"

"Why didn't you let him go, Effie? Ain't I right, I. W.? Ain't I right?"

"S-ay, what's the difference if he likes to show her a good time? If I was a young man, I wouldn't pass her up myself."

"But, I. W., she's—so young!"

"Who's young? I'm nineteen, going on—"

"You've been running with him all the three days he's been here, honey. What's the use getting yourself talked about?"

"Well, any girl in town would be glad to get herself talked about if Leon Kessler was rushing her."

"Effie, I won't let you—I won't—"

Miss Goldstone unhinged her arm, jerking it free in anger.

"Well, I like that!"

"Effie, I—"

"You ain't my boss!"

"Effie!"

"But, papa, she—"

There was a booming in Mr. Goldstone's voice and a suddenly projected vibrancy.

"You apologize to your mother—this minute! You talk to your mother the way you know she's to be talked to!"

"I. W., she didn't—"

"You hear me!"

"I. W.! Don't holler at her; she—"

"She ain't your boss? Well, she just is your boss!

You take back them words and say you're sorry! You apologize to your mother!" Immediate sobs were rumbling up through Miss Goldstone.

"Well, she— I—I didn't do anything. She's down on him. She—"

"Oh, Effie, would I say anything if it wasn't for your own good?"

"You—you were down on him from the start!"

"Effie darling, you must be mad! Would I say anything if it wasn't for our girl's good to—"

"I—oh, Mamma Hat, I'm sorry, darling! I never meant a word. I didn't! I didn't, darling!"

They embraced there in the shrouding darkness, the tears flowing.

"Oh, Effie—Effie!"

"I didn't mean one word I said, darling! I just get nasty like that before I know it. I didn't mean it!"

"My own Effie!"

"My darling Mamma Hat!"

In the shadow of a flowering shrub Mr. Goldstone stood by, mopping. Mrs. Goldstone took the small face between her hands, peering down into it.

"Effie, Effie, don't let—"

Just beyond the enclosing hedge, a motor-car drew up, honking, at the curb, two far-flung paths of light whitening the street and a disused iron negro-boy hitching-post. Miss Goldstone reared back.

"That's him!"

"Effie!"

"Let me go, dearie; let me go!"

"But, Effie—"

"Say, Hattie, I don't want to butt in, but it don't hurt the child should go riding a little while out by Delmar Garden—a man that can handle a car like Leon Kessler. Anyways, it don't pay to hurt the firm's feelings."

There was a constant honking now at the curb, and violent throbbing of engine.

"But, I. W.—"

"Popsie darling, I'll be back early. Mamma Hat, please!"

"Your mother says yes, baby. Tell Kess he should come for Sunday dinner to-morrow."

She was a white streak across the grass, her nervous feet flying. Almost instantly the honk of a horn came streaming back, faint, fainter.

Left standing there, Goldstone was instantly solicitous of his wife, feeling along her arm up under the loose sleeve.

"It don't pay, Hattie, to hurt Kessler's feelings, and, anyhow, what's the difference just so we know who she's running with? It's like this house was a honey-pot and the boys flies."

She turned to him now with her voice full of husk, and even in the dark her face bleached and shrunken from its plumpness.

"You oughtn't to let her! You—hadn't the right! She's too young and too—sweet for a man like him. You oughtn't to let her!"

He stepped out in front of her, taking her by the elbows and holding them close down against her sides.

"Why, Hattie, that child's own mother that loved

her like an angel couldn't worry no more foolishly about her than you do. Gad! I think you wimmin love it! It was the same kind of worrying shortened her mother's life. Always about nothing, too. 'Lenie,' I used to say to her, just to quiet her, 'it was worry killed a Maltese cat; don't let it kill you.' That child is all right, Hattie. What if he does like her pretty well? Worse could happen."

"No, it couldn't! No!"

"Why not? He 'ain't seen her since a child, and all of a sudden he comes West and finds in front of him an eye-opener."

"He's twice her age—more!"

"The way girls demand things nowadays, a man has got to be twice her age before he can provide for her. Leon Kessler is big rich."

"He—he's fast."

"Show me the one that 'ain't sowed his wild oats. Them's the kind that settle down quickest into good husbands."

"He—"

"S-ay, it 'ain't happened yet. I'm the last one to wish my girl off my hands. I only say not a boy in this town could give it to her so good. Fifteen years I've done business with that firm, and with his father before him. A-1 house! S-ay, I should worry that he ain't a Sunday-school boy. Show me the one that is. Your old man in his young days wasn't such a low flier, neither, if anybody should ask you." He made a whirring noise in his throat at that, pinching her cold cheek. She was walking rapidly now toward the house. "Well, since our

daughter goes out riding in a six-thousand-dollar car, to show that we're sports, lets her father and mother take themselves out for a ride in their six-hundred-dollar car. I drive you out as far as Yiddle's farm for some sweet butter, eh?"

"No, no; I'm cold. It's getting damp."

"S-ay, you can't hurt my feelings. On a cool night like this, a brand-new sleeping-porch ain't the worst spot in the world."

They were on the veranda, the hall light falling dimly out and over them.

"She's so young—"

"Now, now, Hattie; worry killed a Maltese cat. Come to bed."

"You go. I want to wait up."

"Hattie, you want to make of yourself the laughingstock of the neighborhood. A grown-up girl goes out riding with a man like Leon Kessler, and you wants to wait up and catch your death of cold. If we had more daughters, I wouldn't have no more wife; I'd have a shadow from worry. Come!"

"I'll be up in a minute, I. W."

He regarded her in some concern.

"Why, Hattie, if there's anything in the world to worry about, wouldn't I be the first? Ain't you well?"

"Yes."

"Then come. I'll get a pitcher of ice-water to take up-stairs."

"I'll be up in a minute."

"I don't want, Hattie, you should wait up for that child and take your death of cold. Because I sleep

like a log when I once hit the bed, don't you play no tricks on me."

"I'll be up in a minute, I. W."

He moved into the house and, after a while, to the clinking of ice against glass, up the stairs.

"Come, Hattie; and be sure and leave the screen door unhooked for her."

"Yes, I. W."

An hour she sat in the shrouded darkness of the elbow of the veranda. Street noises died. The smell of damp came out. Occasionally a motor-car sped by, or a passer-by, each step clear on the asphalt. The song of crickets grated against the darkness. An infant in the right-side house raised a fretful voice once or twice, and then broke into a sustained and coughy fit of crying. Lights flashed up in the windows, silhouettes moving across drawn shades. Then silence again. The university clock, a mile out, chimed twelve, and finally a sonorous one. Mrs. Goldstone lay huddled in her chair, vibrant for sound. At two o'clock the long, high-power car drew up at the curb again, this time without honking. She sat forward, trembling.

There followed a half-hour of voices at the curb, a low voice of undeniable tensity, high laughter that shot up in joyous geysers. It was a fifteen-minute process from the curb to the first of the porch steps, and then Mrs. Goldstone leaned forward, her voice straining to keep its pitch.

"Effie!"

The young figure sprang around the porch pillar.

"Mamma Hat! Honey, you didn't wait up for me?"

Mr. Kessler came forward, goggles pushed up above his cap-visor.

"Well, I'm hanged! What did you think—that I was kidnapping the kid?"

"How—how dared you! It's after two, and—"

Miss Goldstone began then to jump again upon her toes, linking her arm in his.

"Tell her, Leon! Tell her! Oh, Mamma Hat! Mamma Hat!"

She was suddenly in Mrs. Goldstone's arms, her ardent face burning through the white wrapper.

Mr. Kessler removed his cap, flinging it upward again and catching it.

"Tell her, Leon!"

"Well, what would you say, Becker, what would you say if I was to come out here and swipe that little darling there?"

"Oh, Leon—kidder!"

"If—what?"

"I said it!"

"Tell her, Kess; tell it out! Oh, mommie, mommie!"

He leaned forward with his hand on the back of the turbulent head of curls.

"You little darling, I'm going to put you on my back and carry you off to New York."

"Oh, mommie," cried Miss Goldstone, flinging back her head so that her face shone up, "he asked me in Delmar Garden! We're going to live in New York, darling, and Rockaway in summer. He don't

care a rap about the New York girls compared to me. We're going to Cuba on our honeymoon. I'm engaged, darling! I got engaged to-night!"

"That's the idea, Twinkle-pinkle. I'd carry you off to-night if I could!"

"Mommie Hat, ain't you glad?"

"Effie—Effie—"

"Mommie, what is it? What's the matter, darling? What?"

"I—it's just that I got cold, honey, sitting here waiting—the surprise and all. Run, honey, and get me a drink. Crack some ice, dearie, and then run up-stairs in the third floor back and see if there's some brandy up there. Be sure to look for—the brandy. I—I'll be all right."

"My poor, darling, cold mommie!"

She was off on the slim, quick feet, the screen door slamming and vibrating.

Then Mrs. Goldstone sprang up.

"You wouldn't dare! Such a baby—you wouldn't dare!"

"Dare what?"

"You can't have the child! You can't!"

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean?"

He advanced a step, his voice and expression lifted in incredulity.

"Say, look here, Becker, are you stark, raving crazy? Is it possible you don't know that, in your place, nobody but a crazy woman would open her mouth?"

"Maybe; but I don't care. Just leave her alone,

Kess, please! That little baby can stand nothing but happiness."

"Why, woman, you're crazy with the heat If you want to know it, I'm nuts over that little kid. Gad! never ran across anything so full of zip in my life! I'm going to make life one joy ride after another for that joy baby. That kid's the showpiece of the world. She's got me so hipped I'm crazy, and the worst of it is I like it. You don't need to worry. As the boys say, when I settle down, I'm going to settle hard."

"You ain't fit to have her!"

"Say, the kind of life I've lived I ain't ashamed to tell her own father. He's a man, and I'm a man, and life's life."

"You—"

"Now look here, Becker. That 'll be about all. If you're in your right senses, you're going to ring the joy bells louder than any one around here. What you got on your chest you can just as well cut your throat as tell; so we'll both live happy ever after. There's not one thing in my life that any jury wouldn't pass, and—"

"I've seen you drunk."

"Well, what of it? It took three of us to yank old I. W. out from under the table at my sister's wedding."

"You— What about you and Cissie and—"

The light run of feet, and almost instantly Miss Goldstone was pirouetting in between them.

"Here, dearie! There wasn't anything like brandy up in the third floor. I found some cordial in the pantry. Drink it down, dearie; it 'll warm you."

They hovered together, Miss Goldstone trembling between solicitude and her state of intensity.

"Kessie darling, you've got to go now. I want to get mommie up-stairs to bed. You got to go, darling, until to-morrow. Oh, why isn't it to-morrow? I want everybody to know. Don't let on, Mamma Hat. I'll pop it on popsie at breakfast while I'm opening his eggs for him. You come for breakfast, Leon. You're in the family now." He lifted her bodily from her feet, pressing a necklace of kisses round her throat.

"Good night, Twinkle-pinkle, till to-morrow."

"Good night, darling. I won't sleep a wink, waiting for you."

"Me, neither."

"One more, darling—a French one."

"Two for good measure."

"Sleep tight, beautiful! Good night!"

"Good night, beautifulest!"

She stood poised forward on the topmost step, watching him between backward waves of the hand crank, throw his clutch, and steer off. Then she turned inward, a sigh trembling between her lips.

"Oh, Mamma Hat, I—"

But Mrs. Goldstone's chair was empty. Into it with a second and more tremulous sigh sank Miss Goldstone, her lips lifted in the smile that had been kissed.

When Mr. Goldstone slept, every alternate breath started with a rumble somewhere down in the depths of him and, drawn up like a chain from a well, petered out into a thin whistle before the next descent.

Beside him, now, on her knees, Mrs. Goldstone shook at his shoulder.

"I. W.! I. W.! Quick! Wake up!"

He let out a shuddering, abysmal breath.

"I. W.! Please!"

He moaned, turning his face from her.

She tugged him around again, now raising his face between her hands from the pillow.

"I. W.! Try to wake up! For God's sake, I. W.!" He sprang up in a terrified daze, sitting upright in bed.

"My God! Who? What's wrong? Effie! Hattie."

"No, no; don't get excited, I. W. It's me—Hattie!"

"What?"

"Nothing, I. W. Nothing to get excited about. Only I got to tell you something."

"Where's Effie?"

"She's home."

"What time is it?"

"Three."

"Come back to bed, then; you got the nightmare."

"No, no!"

"You ain't well, Hattie? Let me light up."

"No, no; only, I got to tell you something! I 'ain't been to bed; I been waiting up, and—"

"And what?"

"She just came home—engaged!"

"My God! Effie?"

He blinked in the darkness, drawing up his knees to a hump under the sheet.

"Engaged—how?"

"I. W., don't you remember? Wake up, honey. To Kess, to Leon Kessler that she went automobiling with."

"Our Effie engaged—to Leon Kessler?"

"Yes, I. W.—our little Effie!"

A smile spread over his face slowly, and he clasped his hands in an embrace about his knees.

"You don't tell me!"

"Oh, I. W., please—"

"Our little girl. S-ay, how poor Lenie would have loved this happiness! Our little girl engaged to get married!"

"I. W., she—"

"We do the right thing by them—eh, Hattie? Furnish them up as many rooms as they want. But, s-ay, they don't need help from us. He's a lucky boy who gets her, I don't care who he is. Her papa's little Effie, a baby—old enough to get engaged!"

"I. W., she's too—young. Don't give him our little Effie; she's too young!"

"I married her mother, Hattie, when she wasn't yet eighteen."

"I know, I. W., but not to Leon Kessler. She's such a baby, I. W. He—didn't I work for him nine years, I. W.—don't I know what he is!"

"I'm surprised, Hattie, you should hold so against a man his wild oats."

"Then why ain't oats for the man oats for the woman? It's the men that sow the wild oats and the women—us women that's got to reap them!"

"S-ay, life is life. Do you want to put your head up against a brick wall?"

"A wall that men built!"

"It's always hard, Hattie, for good women like you and like poor Lenie was to understand. It's better you don't. You shouldn't even think about it."

"But, I. W.—"

"If I didn't know Leon Kessler was no worse than ninety-nine good husbands in a hundred, you think I would let him lay a finger on the apple of my eye? I don't understand, Hattie; all of a sudden this evening, you're so worked up. Instead of happiness, you come like with a funeral. Is that why you wake me up out of a sleep? To cry about it? Don't think, Hattie, that just as much as you I haven't got the good of my child at heart. Out of a sound sleep she wakes me to cry because a happiness has come to us. Leon Kessler can have any girl in this town he wants. Maybe he wasn't a Sunday-school boy in his day—but say, show me one that was."

She drew herself up, grasping him at the shoulders.

"I. W., don't let him have our little Effie!"

"Nonsense!" he said, in some distaste for her voice choked with tears. "Cut out this woman foolishness now and come to bed. Is this something new you're springing on me? I got no patience with women who indulge themselves with nervous breakdowns. I never thought, Hattie, you had nothing like that in you."

Her voice was rising now in hysteria, slipping up frequently beyond her control.

"If you do, I can't stand it! I can't stand it, I. W.!"

He peered at her in the starlight that came down through the screened-in top of the sleeping-porch.

"Why?" he said, suddenly awake, and shortly.

"I worked for him nine years, I. W. I—I know him."

"How?"

"I know him, I. W. She's too good for him."

"How do you know him?"

"I—the girls, I. W. One little girl now, Cissie—I—I hear it all from my friend Delehanty—sometimes she—she writes to me. I—the models and—the girls and—and the lady buyers—they—they used to gossip in the factory and—I—I used to hear about it. I. W., don't! Let go! You hurt!" His teeth and his hands were very tight, and he hung now over the side of the bed and toward her.

"He—I. W.—he—"

"He what? He what?"

"He—ain't good enough."

"I say he is!"

"But he—I. W.—she—she's such a baby and he—he— You hurt!"

"Then tell me, he what?"

"I. W., you're hurting me!"

"He what—do you hear?—he what?"

"Don't make me say it! Don't! It—it just happened—with him meaning one thing all the time and—me another. I was thrown with that kind of a crowd, I. W., all my life. All the girls, they—

It don't make me worse than it makes him. With me it was once; with him it's—it's— I didn't know, I. W. My mother she died that year before, and—I needed the job, and I swear to God, I. W., I—kept hoping even if he never put it in words he'd fix it. Kill me, if you want to, I. W., but don't throw our Effie to him! Don't! Don't! Don't!"

She was pounding the floor with her bare palms, her face so distorted that the mouth drawn tight over the teeth was as wide and empty as a mask's, and sobs caught and hiccoughed in her throat.

"I didn't know, I. W.! Don't kill me for what I didn't know!"

She crouched back from his knotted face, and he sprang then out of bed, nightshirt flapping about his knees, and his fists and his bulging eyes raised to the quiet stars.

"God," he cried, "help me to keep hold of myself! Help me! You—you—"

His voice was so high and so tight in his throat that it stuck, leaving him in inarticulate invocation.

"I. W.!"

"My child engaged to—to her mother's—you—you—"

"I. W.! Do you see now? You wouldn't let him have her! You wouldn't, I. W.! Tell me you wouldn't!"

"I want him if he touches her to be struck dead! I want him to be struck dead!"

"Thank God!" said Mrs. Goldstone, weeping now tears that eased her breathing.

Suddenly he leaned toward her, his voice rather

quieter, but his forefinger waggling out toward the open door.

"You go!" he said, and then in a gathering hurricane of fury, "go!"

"I. W., don't yell! Don't! Don't!"

"Go—while I'm quiet. Go—you hear?"

She edged around him where he stood, in fear of his white, crouched attitude.

"I. W.!"

He made a step toward her, and, at the sound in his throat, she ran out into the hallway and down the stairs to the porch. In the deep shade of the veranda's elbow a small figure lay deep in sleep in the wicker rocker, one bare arm up over her head and lips parted.

In a straight chair beside her Mrs. Goldstone sat down. She was shuddering with chill and repeating to herself, quite aloud and over and over again:

"What have I done? What have I done? What have I done?"

She was suddenly silent then, staring out ahead, her hands clutching the chair-arms.

To her inflamed fancy, it was as if, beyond the hedge, the old disused hitching-post had become incarnate and, in the form of her naïve and horned conception, was coming toward her with the whites of his eyes bloodshot.

A PETAL ON THE CURRENT

WERE I only swifter and more potent of pen, I could convey to you all in the stroke of a pestle the H_2O, the pigment of the red-cheeked apple, the blue of long summer days, and the magnesia of the earth for which Stella Schump was the mortal and mortar receptacle.

She was about as exotic as a flowering weed which can spring so strongly and so fibrously from slack. And yet such a weed can bleed milk. If Stella Schump was about fourteen pounds too plump, too red of cheek, and too blandly blue of eye, there was the very milk of human kindness in her morning punching up of her mother's pillows and her smoothing down of the gray and poorly hair. She could make a bed freshly, whitely, her strong young arms manœuvering under but not even jarring the poor old form so often prone there.

There was a fine kind of virile peasantry in the willing hands, white enough, but occasionally broken at the nails from eight hours of this box in and that box out in a children's shoe department.

Differing by the fourteen pounds, Watteau would have scorned and Rubens have adored to paint her.

She was not unconscious of the rather flaxen

ripple of her hair, which she wore slickly parted and drawn back, scallop by scallop, to a round and shining mat of plaits against the back of her head. But neither was she unconscious that she thereby enhanced the too high pitch of her cheek-bones and the already too generous width between them. It was when Stella Schump opened wide her eyes that she transcended the milky fleshliness and the fact that, when she walked rapidly, her cheeks quivered in slight but gelatinous fashion. Her eyes—they were the color of perfect June at that high-noon moment when the spinning of the humming-bird can be distilled to sound. Laura and Marguerite and Stella Schump had eyes as blue as Cleopatra's, and Sappho's and Medea's must have been green.

For reading and occasional headaches, she wore a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles prescribed but not specially ground by the optical department, cater-corner from the children's shoes. Upon the occasion of their first adjustment, Romance, for the first time, had leaned briefly into the smooth monotony of Miss Schump's day-by-day, to waft a scented, a lace-edged, an elusive kerchief.

"You ought to heard, mamma, that fellow over in the specs, when he gimme the test for the glasses."

"What?"

"Tee-hee!—it sounds silly to repeat it."

"You got the Schump eyes, Stella. I always used to say, with his big blue ones, your poor father ought to been a girl, too."

"'Say,' he said to me, he said, just like that, 'I know a society who will pay you a big fat sum if

you'll sign over them eyes for post-mortem laboratory work. Believe me, Bettina,' he said, just like that, 'those are some goo-goos!' "

" 'Goo-goos'?"

"Yes, ma—the way I look out of them."

"See, Stella, if you'd only mix with the young men and not be so stiff-like with them. See! Is he the sober, genteel kind who could sit out an evening in a self-respectin' girl's front parlor?"

"I—I can't ask a fellow if he didn't ask me, can I? I can't make a pusher out of myself."

"A girl don't have to make a pusher out of herself to have beaus; it's natural for her to have them in moderation. I don't want my girl shut out of her natural pleasures."

"'Believe me, Bettina,' he said, 'those are some goo-goos'—just like that, he said it."

"Before I'd let a girl like Cora Kinealy have all the beaus! I bet *she'd* ask him."

"It—it just ain't in me, ma. The other girls do, I know—you ought to heard the way Mabel Runyan was kiddin' a fellow in the silks to-day—it just ain't in me to."

"Nowadays, young men got to be made to feel welcome."

"I just don't seem to take."

" 'I'll be pleased to have you call of a Saturday night, Mr. So-and-so.' No one could say there's anything but the genteel in that. Those are just the words I used to say to your poor father when he was courtin'."

"If only I—I wouldn't turn all red!"

"I bet Cora Kinealy would have asked him."

"I—I'll ask him, ma."

When Stella Schump was adjusting her black sleevelets next morning, somewhat obviously oblivious of the optical department across the aisle, a blond, oiled head leaned out at her.

"Mornin', Goo-goo!"

A flush that she could feel rush up and that would not be controlled threw her into a state of agitation that was almost abashing to behold.

"Tee-hee!"

"Believe me, Bettina, those are some goo-goos!"

"I'd be pleased to have you—come—to—"

"I told the little wifey last night, 'Angel Face, I've found a pair of goo-goos that are a close runner-up to yours.'"

Miss Schump turned to her first customer of the day, the flush receding as suddenly as it had come to scorch.

"Copper toes for the little boy? Just be seated, please."

Thus did the odor of romance lay for the merest moment upon the stale air of Miss Schump's routine.

Evenings, in the high-ceilinged, long-windowed, and inside-shuttered little flat in very West Thirteenth Street, tucked up in the top story of one of a row of made-over-into-apartments residences that boasted each a little frill of iron balcony and railed-in patch of front lawn, they would sit beside an oil-lamp with a flowered china shade, Mrs. Schump,

gnarled of limb and knotted of joint, ever busy, except on the most excruciatingly rheumatic of her days, at a needlework so cruel, so fine that for fifteen years of her widowhood it had found instant market at a philanthropic Woman's Exchange.

Very often Miss Cora Kinealy, also of the children's shoes, would rock away an evening in that halo of lamplight, her hair illuminated to copper and her hands shuttling in and out at the business of knitting. There were frank personal discussions, no wider in diameter than the little circle of light itself.

MISS KINEALY (*slumped in her chair so that her knee rose higher than her waist-line*): I always say of Stella, she's one nut too hard for me to crack, and I've cracked a good many in my life. Why that girl 'ain't got beaus galore—well, I give up!

MRS. SCHUMP (*stooped for an infinitesimal stab of needle*): She don't give 'em a chance, Cora. You can't tell me there is not many a nice, sober young man wouldn't be glad to sit out a Saturday evening with her. She's that bashful she don't give 'em a chance. I tell her it's almost as much ruination to a girl to be too retiring as to be too forward. She don't seem to have a way with the boys.

MISS SCHUMP (*in a pink, warm-looking flannelette kimono and brushing out into fine fluff her flaxen-looking hair, and then, in the name of to-morrow's kink, plaiting it into a multitude of small, tight-looking braids*): You can talk, mamma. You, too, Cora, with a boy like Archie Sensenbrenner and your wedding-day in sight. But what's a girl goin' to do if she don't take; if she ain't got an Archie?

MRS. SCHUMP (*riding her glasses down toward the end of her nose to look up sharply over them*): Get one.

"There you go again! Honest, you two make me mad. I can't go out and lasso 'em, can I?"

"She doesn't give 'em a chance, Cora; mark my word! The trouble is, she's too good for most she sees. They ain't up to her."

"I can't understand it, Mrs. Schump. I always say there ain't a finer girl on the floor than Stella. When I see other girls, most of 'em fresh little ragtimers that ain't worth powder and shot, bringing down the finest kind of fellows, and Stella never asked out or nothing, I always say to myself, 'I can't understand it.' Take me—what Arch Sensenbrenner ever seen in me, with Stella and her complexion working in the same department—"

"You got a way, Cora. There's just something about me don't take with the boys. Honest, if I could only see one of you girls alone with a fellow once, to see how you do it!"

"Just listen to her, Mrs. Schump, with her eyes and complexion and all!"

"There's not a reason my girl shouldn't have it as good and better than the best of them. She's a good girl, Cora. Stella's a good girl to me."

"Aw, mamma—"

"Don't I know it, Mrs. Schump! I always say if ever a girl would make some nice-earning, steady fellow a good wife, it's—"

"'Good wife'! That ain't the name! Why, Cora, for ten years that child has lifted me on my bad days and carried me and babied me like I was a

queen. It's nothing for her to rub me two hours straight. Not a day before she leaves for work that she don't come to me and—"

"Fellows don't care about that kind of thing. A girl's got to have pep and something besides complexion and elbow-grease. I'm too fat."

"She's always sayin' she's too fat. With one pound off, would she look as good, Cora? If I hadn't been as plump as a partridge in my girl-days —and if I do say it myself, I was as fine a lookin' girl as my Stella—do you think Dave Schump would have had eyes for me? Not if I was ten times the woman I was for him."

"Sure she ain't too fat, Mrs. Schump. I always tell her it's her imagination. I know a girl bigger than she is that's keeping company with an expert piano-tuner. Why, I know girls twice her size. Stella's got a right good figure, she has."

"Lots of good it does me! I— It's just like my brains to go right to my hands, once you put me with a fellow. That time your brother Ed called for me for that party at your house — honest, I couldn't open my mouth to him."

"Can't understand it! 'Honest,' I says to Ed that time after the party, I says to him, 'Ed, why don't you go over and call on Stella Schump and take her to a movie or something? She's my idea of a girl, Stella is.' Think I could budge him? 'Naw,' was all I could get out of him. Just, 'Naw.' Honest, I could have shook him. But did he run down to that little flirt of a Gert Cobb's the very same night? He did. Honest, like I said to Arch, it

makes me sick. Is it any wonder the world is filled with little flips like Gert Cobb, the way the fellows fall for 'em?"

"I never could be fresh with a boy. Take that time at your party. I bet your brother Ed would have liked me better if I'd have got out in the middle of the floor with him, like he wanted me to and like Gert did, to see who could blow the biggest bunch of suds off his stein. I never could be fresh with a fellow."

"That's just the trouble, Mrs. Schump. Stella don't see the difference between what's fresh and what's just fun. Is there anything wrong about one stein of beer in a jolly crowd? A girl can be nice without being goody-good. If there's anything a fellow hates, it's a goody-good. Take a fellow like Arch—you think he'd have any time for me if I wasn't a good-enough sport to take a glass of beer with him maybe once a week when he gets to feeling thirsty? Nothing rough. Everything in moderation, I always say. But there's a difference, Mrs. Schump, between being rough and being a goody-good."

"There's something in what you say, Cora. I've had her by me so much, maybe I've tried to raise her a little over-genteel. There ain't one single bad appetite she's got to be afraid of. It's not in her. I used to tell her poor father, one glass of beer could make him so crazy loony he never had to try how two tasted."

"I'm bashful, and what you goin' to do about it?"

"Say, you and Ed's foreman ought to meet

together! Honest, you'd be a pair! Ed brought him to the house one night. Finest boy you ever seen. Thirty-five a week, steady as you make 'em; and when they put in girls to work down at the munitions-plant where him and Ed works, Ed said it was all they could do to keep him from throwing up his job from fright. Whatta you know? A dandy fellow like him, with a dagger-shaped scar clear down his arm from standing by his job that time when the whole south end of the plant exploded. A fellow that could save a whole plant and two hundred lives afraid to face a few skirts! Crazy to get married. Told Ed so. Always harping on his idea of blue eyes and yellow hair, and then, when he gets the chance, afraid of a few skirts!"

"That's me every time with fellows. I get to feelin' down inside of me something terrible—scary—and all."

"Say, I'll tell you what! I'll get Ed to bring him down to Gert Cobb's party next Saturday night, and you come, too."

"I?"

"There's two of a kind for you, Mrs. Schump. A fellow that's more afraid of girls than explosions, and a girl that's afraid to blow a little foam off a glass of beer! Them two ought to meet. Me and Arch and Ed 'll fix it up. How's that for a scheme? Now say I ain't your friend! Are you game?"

"I don't go out tryin' to meet fellows that way."

"You see, Mrs. Schump, the way she puts a gold fence around herself?"

"Cora's puttin' herself out for you, Stella. There's

no harm in a Saturday night's party in the company of Cora and some genteel friends."

"Gert Cobb don't know I'm on earth."

"You hear, Mrs. Schump? Is it any wonder she don't get out? All I got to do is say the word, and any friend of mine is welcome in Gert Cobb's house."

"I'll make you up them five yards of pink mull for it, Stella. It's a shame that pretty dress-pattern from your two birthdays ago has never had the occasion to be made up. It's nice of Cora to be puttin' herself out."

"Look at 'er, like I was asking her to a funeral!"

"There's such a pretty sash I been savin' to make up with that mull, Cora. A handsome black-moiré length of ribbon off a beaded basque her father gimme our first Christmas married."

"I'll lend her my pink pearls to wear. Honest, I never knew a girl could wear pink like Stella."

Miss Schump leaned forward in the lamplight, the myriad of tight little braids at angles, but her eyes widening to their astounding blueness.

"Not your—pink beads, Cora?"

"You heard me the first time, didn't you? 'Pink' was what I said."

"Ma!"

"Now ain't that nice of Cora?"

"Quick—are you game?"

"Why, yes—Cora."

There is a section of New York which rays out rather crazily from old Jefferson Market and Night

Court in spokes of small streets that seem to run at haphazard angles each to the other—that less sooty part of Greenwich not yet invaded by the Middle West in search of bohemia. An indescribable smack of Soho here, tired old rows of tired old houses going down year by year before the wrecker's ax, the model tenement rising insolently before the scar is cold.

It is that part of the Latin Quarter which is literally just that, lying slightly to the south and slightly to the west of that odd-fellow's land of short-haired women and long-haired men. Free love, free verse, free thought, free speech, and freed I. W. W.'s have no place here. For three blocks a little Italy runs riot in terms of pastry, spaghetti, and plaster-of-Paris shops, and quite as abruptly sobers and becomes Soho again. A Greek church squats rather broadly at the intersection of three of these streets.

There intervened between Stella Schump's and the six-story model tenement adjoining the Greek church which Miss Gertrude Cobb called home, a rhomboid of park, municipally fitted with play-ground apparatus, the three-block riot of little Italy, the gloomy barracks of old Jefferson Market and Night Court, and a few more blocks of still intact, tired old rows of tired old houses.

On a spring night that was as insinuatingly sweet as the crush of a rose to the cheek there walked through these lowly streets of lower Manhattan Mr. Archie Sensenbrenner, bounded on the north by a checked, deep-visored cap; on the south by a very bulldogged and very tan pair of number nines;

on the east by Miss Cora Kinealy, very much of the occasion in a peaked hood faced in eider-down and a gay silk bag of slippers dangling; on the west by Miss Stella Schump, a pink scarf entwining her head like a Tanagra.

"Honest, Cora, I feel just like I'm intruding."

"'Intrudin'! Would I have invited her if we didn't want her, Arch?"

"Naw."

" 'There's always room for one more,' is my motto. I believe it always comes home to the girl that don't share her good times. If me and Arch couldn't call by for a girl on our way to a party, I'd feel sorry for us. Give her your arm, Arch."

"Here! I tried once to, and she wouldn't take it."

Miss Schump hooked a highly diffident hand into Mr. Sensenbrenner's sharply jutted elbow.

"You two go on and talk together. I've chewed Arch's right ear off already."

"It's a grand evenin'—ain't it, Mr. Sensenbrenner?"

At that from Miss Schump, Miss Kinealy executed a very soprano squeal that petered out in a titter of remonstrances.

"Arch Sensenbrenner, if you don't stop pinching me! Honest, my arm's black and blue! Honest! What 'll Stella think we are? Now cut it out!"

They walked a block in silence, but, beside her, Miss Schump could feel them shaking to a duet of suppressed laughter, and the red in her face rose higher and a little mustache of the tiniest of perspiration beads came out over her lip. The desire to turn back, the sudden ache for the quietude of the little halo of

lamplight and the swollen finger-joints of her mother in and out at work, were almost not to be withstood.

"I— You—you and Mr. Sensenbrenner go on, Cora. I—me not knowin' Gertie Cobb and all—I—I—feel I'm intruding. You and him go on. Please!"

Miss Kinealy crossed to her, kindly at once and sobered.

"Now, Stella Schump, you're coming right to this party with me and Arch. We can't do more than tell her she's welcome, can we, Arch?"

"Sure."

"I promised your mother I'm going to see to it that you get away from her apron-strings and out among young folks more, and you're coming right to this party with me and Arch. Ain't I right, Arch?"

"Sure."

"You mustn't feel bad, honey, that Ed couldn't get John Gilly to come around and call after you. Ed says he'd never get him to steam up his nerve enough to call at a girl's house after her; but ain't it enough he's coming to Gert's to-night just to meet you? You ought to heard him when Ed got to telling him what kind of a girl you was. 'Gee!' Ed says he says. 'Big blue eyes like saucers sounds good to me! Well,' he says, Ed says he says, 'if my nerve don't lay down on me, I'll show up there with you.' That's something, ain't it, for a fellow like John Gilly to do just to meet a girl? Ain't it, Arch, for that fine, big fellow, Ed's foreman, you seen up at our house that night? You know the one I mean, the one with his arm scalded up from the explosion."

"Sure."

"Honest, if I wasn't already tagged and spoken for, I'd set my cap for him myself."

"'Mother, mother, mother, pin a rose on me!'" cried Mr. Sensenbrenner, with no great pertinence.

Miss Kinealy threw him a northwest glance. "Ain't he the cut-up, Stella?"

"He sure is."

"Br-a-a-y!" said Mr. Sensenbrenner, again none too relevantly.

"Oh, show her the way the zebra in the Park goes on Sunday morning, Arch!"

He inserted two fingers, splaying his mouth. "Heigh-ho! He-e-e-e-e-e-e-e!"

"Ain't that lifelike, Stella?"

"It sure is."

"Oh, look! Up there — the third story — see — those are the Cobbs' windows, all lit up! Oh, gee! I just can't make my feet behave. Waltz me around again, Archie! No; you got to take the first dance with Stella."

"Oh no, Cora; he wants—"

"You hear, Arch?"

"Sure; only, I can't force her if she don't want to."

"Sure she wants to! Hurry! I hear Skinnay Flint's ukulele. Gee! I just can't make my feet be-have!"

They entered an institutional, sanitary, and legislation-smelling box of foyer and up three flights of fire-proof stairs. At each landing were four fire-proof doors, lettered. The Cobbs' door, "H," stood open, an epicene medley of voices and laughter

floating down the long neck of hallway on the syncopated whine of a ukulele.

There was an immediate parting of ways, Mr. Sensenbrenner hanging his cap on an already well-filled rack of pegs and making straight for the sound of revelry by night.

The girls made foray into a little side pocket of bedroom for the changing of shoes, whitening of noses, and various curlicue preambles.

"Stella, your hair looks swell!"

"Ma plaited it up last night with sugar-water."

"Here, just this speck on your lips, just a little to match your cheeks!— See—all the girls use it."

"Ugh—no—"

"There, just a stroke. Fine! Say, wasn't Arch killing to-night when he called my cheeks naturally curly?"

"You look grand, Cora. Sure you don't want your pink beads?"

"I'll throw 'em down and step on 'em if you take 'em off."

"I just love that changeable silk on you."

"Does the split under the arm show?"

"Notta bit."

"Come on, then!"

"Oh, Cora—"

"Come on!"

In the Cobb front room a frightened exodus of furniture had taken place. A leather-and-oak "davenbed" had obviously and literally been dragged to the least conspicuous corner. An unpainted center of floor space showed that there had been a rug.

Camp-chairs had been introduced against all available wall space. Only a fan-shaped, three-shelved cabinet of knickknacks had been allowed its corner. Diagonal from it, the horn of a talking-machine, in shape a large, a violent, a tin morning-glory, was directed full against the company.

Not a brilliant scene, except by grace or gracelessness of state of mind. But to Stella Schump, neither elected nor electing to walk in greater glory, there was that about the Cobb front room thus lighted, thus animated, that gave her a sense of function—a crowding around the heart. The neck of hallway might have been a strip of purple, awninged.

There were greetings that rose in crescendo and falsetto.

"Cora Kinealy! Hello, Cora! How's every little thing?" "Baby-shoes—tra-la-la!" "Oh, you changeable-silk kiddo! Turn green for the ladies." "Come on over here, Cora, and make Arch tell fortunes!"

"Gertie, this is my girl friend, Stella, from the shoes, I brought. Y'know? I told you about her. Ed's bringing down a gentleman friend for her."

Miss Gertie Cobb, so blond, so small, so titillating that she resembled nothing so much as one of those Dresden table-candelabra under a pink glass-fringed shade with the fringe always atinkle, laughed upward in a voice eons too old.

"Make yourself right at home. At our house, it's what you don't see ask for. Skin-nay Flint, if you

don't stop! Make him quit, Cora; he's been ticklin' me something awful with that little old feather duster he brought along. Whatta you think this is—Coney Island? E-e-e-e-e-e!"

There ensued a scramble down the length of the room, Miss Cobb with her thin, bare little arms flung up over her head, Miss Kinealy tugging and then riding in high buffoonery over the bare floor. firmly secured to Mr. Flint's coattails.

"Leggo!"

"Quit—ouch—e-e-e-e-e! That's right; give it to him! Cora—go to it—e-e-e-e-e—"

Lips lifted to belie a sinkage of heart, Miss Schump, left standing, backed finally, sinking down to one of the camp-chairs against the wall. The little glittering mustache had come out again, and, sitting there, her smile so insistently lifted, the pink pearls at her throat rose and fell. The ukulele was whanging again, and a couple or two, locked cheek to cheek, were undulating in a low-lidded kind of ecstasy. Finally, Cora Kinealy and Archie Sensenbrenner, rather uglily oblivious.

A youth, frantic to outdistance a rival for the dancing-hand of Miss Gertie Cobb, stumbled across Miss Schump's carefully crossed ankles.

" 'Scuse," he said, without glancing back.

"Certainly," said Miss Schump, through aching tonsils.

There was an encore, the raucous-throated morning-glory taking up where the ukulele had left off. Miss Schump sat on, the smile drawn more and more resolutely across her face. Occasionally, to indicate

a state of social ease, she caught an enforced yawn with her hand.

After a while Mrs. Cobb entered, quietly, almost furtively, hands wrapped muff fashion in a checked apron, sitting down softly on the first of the camp-chairs near the door. She had the dough look of the comfortable and the uncorseted fat, her chin adding a scallop as, watching, her smile grew.

"It's great to watch the young ones," she said, finally.

Miss Schump moved gratefully, oh, so gratefully, two chairs over.

"It sure is," she said, assuming an attitude of conversation.

"Like I tell Gert, it makes me young again myself."

"It sure does."

"Give it to 'em in the house, I say, and it keeps 'em in off the street."

"Your daughter is sure one pretty girl."

"Gert's a good-enough girl, if I could keep her in. I tell 'er of all my young ones she's the prettiest and the sassiest. Law, how that girl can sass!"

"Like my mother always says to me about sass, sass never gets a girl nowheres."

"Indeed it don't! It's lost her more places than my other two, married now, ever lost put together. You work in the Criterion?"

"Yes'm. Children's shoes."

"I bet you're not the kind of a girl to change places every week."

"No'm. Criterion is the only place I ever worked at. I started there as Cash."

"I bet you give up at home out of your envelop."

"Yes'm."

"Father?"

"No'm. He was a night watchman and got shot on duty."

"Mother?"

"Yes'm."

"Brother?"

"No'm."

"Sister?"

"No'm."

"Only child, huh?"

"Yes'm."

Then Miss Cobb blew up in a state of breathless haste and bobbing of curls.

"Eats, maw — eats! The crowd's thirsty — spittin' cotton. What's the idea? My tongue's out. Eats! Quick, for Gawsakes—eats!"

Mrs Cobb, wide and quivery of hip, retreated precipitately into the slit of hallway. Almost immediately there were refreshments, carried in on portentous black tin trays by a younger Cobb in pigtails and by Mrs. Cobb, swayback from a great outheld array of tumblers and bottles.

A shout went up.

The tray of sandwiches, piled to an apex, scarcely endured one round of passing. The fluted tin tops of bottles were pried off. Tumblers clicked. There were the sing of suds and foamy overflowings.

Enter Mr. Ed Kinealy, very brown and tight of suit, very black and pomaded of hair.

"Oh, Ed!" This from Miss Kinealy between

large mouthfuls of sandwich and somewhat jerkily, from being dandled on Mr. Sensenbrenner's knee. "Where's your friend—where's John Gilly?"

"Oh, Ed!" "Naouw, Eh-ud!" "I'll give you a slap on the wrist." "Naouw, Ed!" Delivered by those present in a chorus of catcalls and falsetto impersonations of Miss Kinealy in plaintive vein.

"Now tell me—where is he, Ed? Shut, up everybody! Where is he, Ed?"

Mr. Kinealy shot a pair of very striped cuffs.

"That guy had sense. One whiff of this rough-house and he bolted down again, six steps at a jump. He slipped me so easy I was talking to myself all the way up-stairs. That guy had sense. Petticoat shush-shush can't put nothing over on him."

"Aw, Ed!"

CHORUS: Aw, Eh-ud! Aw, Eh-ud! Naouw—

"And him dated for Stella! Honest, it's a rotten shame!" Suddenly Miss Kinealy flashed to her feet, her glance running quick. "Where is she? Well, Stella Schump, sitting over there playing chums with yourself! Honest, your name ought to be Chump! Whatta you think that is—the amen corner? You're a fine bunch of social entertainers, you fellows are! Bring her up a chair. Gee! you are! Honest, Gertie Cobb, I wouldn't want my cat to be company to you! Bring 'er up a chair, Ed. Here, next to me! Honest, it's a rotten shame! Give 'er a sandwich. Open 'er up a bottle. Gee! you're a fine crowd of fish, you are!"

There was a general readjustment of circle and scraping of chairs. Miss Schump, scarlet, drew

up and in, Mr. Kinealy prying off a fluted top for her.

"Have this one on me, Stella!" he cried. "Your guy bolted of stage fright; but I'm here, and don't you forget it!"

"Aw—tee-hee!" she said, wiping at her upper lip.

"Here!"

She regarded the foam sing down into amber quiet.

"I'm on the water-wagon," she said, essaying to be light of vein, crossing her hands and feet and tilting her glance at him.

"Say, here's a girl won't blow the foam off a fellow's glass for fear she'll get soapsuds in her eyes!"

"Wash her face with 'em!"

Miss Kinealy: Aw, now, Stella; can't you be a good fellow for once? Do it, if it hurts you. Honest, I hate to say it, but you're the limit, you are! My God! limber up a little—limber up!

"Here, now—open your mouth and shut your eyes."

"Open it for her, Ed."

"Aw, no; don't force her if she don't want it."

"Gowann, Stella; be human, if it hurts you."

Redly and somewhat painfully, the observed of all observers, Miss Schump tilted her head and drank, manfully and shudderingly, to the bitter end of the glass.

"Attaboy! Say, tell it to the poodles and the great Danes! That Jane's no amachure!"

Eyes stung to tears, pink tip of her tongue quickly

circling her lips, Miss Schump held out to Mr. Kinealy the empty tumbler.

"Now, there!"

"More?"

"I'm game."

"Don't give 'er a whole glass, Ed."

She drank, again at one whiff.

"That's more like it! Didn't kill you, did it? Now eat that Swiss-cheese sandwich and come over next to me and Arch while he tells fortunes."

Miss Schump rose, rather high of head, the moment hers.

Miss Kinealy stretched her hand out into the center of the closing-in circle of heads.

"I said palm-reading, Arch, not hand-holding. Leave that part to Ed and Gert over there. Now quit squeezing—"

Mr. Sensenbrenner bent low, almost nose to her palm.

"I see," he began, his voice widening to a drawl —"I se-e a fellow about my size and complexion entering your life—"

To Miss Schump, her hand on Miss Kinealy's shoulder and her head peering over, the voice seemed to trail off somewhere out into infinitudes of space, off into bogs of eternity, away and behind some beyond.

"Gee! it's hot in here!" she muttered, no one heeding or hearing. "Sure hot. Whew!"

"Going on a long journey, and a fellow about my size and complexion is going along with you, and there's money coming—"

"Sure hot!" It was then Miss Schump, with fear of a rather growing and sickening sense of dizziness and of the wavy and unstable outline of things, slipped quietly and unobtrusively out into the hallway, her craving for air not to be gainsaid. The door to the little bedroom stood open, her pink scarf uppermost on the cot-edge. She stood for an instant in the doorway, regarding and wanting it, but quite as suddenly turned, and down the three flights gained the dewy quiet of out-of-doors, fighting muzziness.

The street had long since fallen tranquil, the Greek church casting immense shadow. The air had immediate and sedative effect upon Miss Schump's rather distressing symptoms of unrest, but not quite allaying a certain state of mental upheaval. She had the distinct sensation of the top of her head lifted off from the eyebrows up. Her state of lightheadedness took voice.

"Gimme," she said, lifting the pink-mull, ankle-length skirt as if it trailed a train and marching off down-street; "now you gimme!"

An entirely new lack of self-consciousness enhanced her state of giddiness. A titter seemed to run just a scratch beneath the surface of her.

The passing figure of a woman in a black cape and a bulge of bundle elicited a burst of laughter which her hand clapped to her mouth promptly subdued. Awaiting the passing of a street-car, she was again prone to easy laughter.

"Oh, you!" she said, quirking an eye to the motorman, who quirked back.

Crossing the street, she came down rather splashily in a pool of water, wetting and staining the light slippers.

"Aw!" she repeated, scolding and stamping down at them. "Aw! Aw! You!"

Across from the gloomy pile of old Jefferson Market, she stood, reading up at an illuminated tower-clock, softly, her lips moving.

"Nine—ten—e-lev-hun—"

A dark figure slowed behind her elbow; she turned with a sense of that nearness and peered up under the lowering brim of a soft-felt hat.

"Hoddado?"

"Hello!" she answered, slyly.

"Hello!"

She peered closer.

"Got a girl?"

"Nope."

"Blow suds?"

"Where?"

"Cora's."

He flung back his coat, revealing a star.

"You're under arrest," he said, laconically. "Solicitin'. Come on; no fuss."

Her comprehension was unplumbed.

"O Lord!" she said, pressing inward at her waistline to abet laughter, following him voluntarily enough, and her voice rising. "You make me laugh. You make me laugh."

"That 'll do," he said.

"Whoop la-la!"

"Now, you get noisy and watch me."

He turned in rather abruptly at a side door of the dark-red pile of building which boasted the illuminated tower-clock and a jutting ell with barred windows

She drew back.

"No, you don't! Aw, no, you don't! Whatta you think I yam? Cora's! Tell it to the poodles and the great Danes!"

He shoved her with scant ceremony beyond the heavy door. She entered in one of the uncontrollable gales of laughter, the indoor heat immediately inducing the dizziness.

"Whatta you think I yam? Tell it to the poodles and the great Danes!"

Thirty minutes later, in a court-room as smeared of atmosphere as a dirty window, a bridge officer, reading from a slip of paper, singsonged to the sergeant-at-arms:

"Stella Schump. Officer Charles Costello."

How much more daringly than my poor pen would venture, did life, all of a backhanded, flying leap of who knows what centrifugal force, transcend for Stella Schump the vague boundaries of the probable.

The milky-fleshed, not highly sensitized, pinkly clean creature of an innocence born mostly of ignorance and slow perceptions, who that morning had risen sweet from eleven hours of unrestless sleep beside a mother whose bed she had never missed to share, suddenly here in slatternliness! A draggled night bird caught in the aviary of night court, lips a deep vermilion scar of rouge, hair out

of scallop and dragging at the pins, the too ready laugh dashing itself against what must be owned a hiccough.

Something congenital and sleeping subcutaneously beneath the surface of her had scratched through. She was herself, strangely italicized.

A judge regarded her not unkindly. There were two of him, she would keep thinking, one merging slightly into his prototype.

She stood, gazing up. Around her swam the court-room — rows of faces; comings and goings within her railed area. And heat—the dizzying, the exciting heat—and the desire to shake off the some one at her elbow. That some one was up before her now, in a chair beside the judge, and his voice was as far away as Archie Sensenbrenner's.

"And she says to me, she says, your Honor, 'Got a girl?'"

"Were those her exact words to you?"

"Yes, your Honor."

"Proceed.'

"And I says to her, I says, 'No,' and then she comes up close and says to me, she says, 'Buy me a drink?'"

"Were those her exact words?"

"Yes, your Honor, as near as I can remember.

"Go on."

"And I says to her, 'Where do you want to go?' and she says to me, giving me a wink, 'Cora's.'"

"Cora's?"

"Yes, your Honor; the Cora Jones mulatto woman that was cleaned out last week."

"She suggested that you accompany her to the house of the Jones woman?"

"Beg pardon, your Honor?"

"She suggested this resort?"

"Yes, your Honor. 'Cora Jones,' she said."

Through the smoke of her bewilderment something irate stirred within Miss Schump, a smouldering sense of anger that burst out into a brief tongue of flame.

"You! You! You're no amachure! Cora Jones! Cora Kinealy! Go tell it to the great Danes! Say it again! Gimme leave! Gimme leave!" The immediate peremptoriness of the gavel set her to blinking, but did not silence. "'Gimme leave,' was what I said—"

"Come to order in the court!"

"Aw!"

A new presence at her elbow grasped her sharply. She subsided, but still muttering.

"Proceed, officer."

"And then, when she starts off with me, I says to her, I says, 'You're under arrest,' and brought her over."

"That 'll do."

"Does the defendant wish to take the chair?"

From her elbow, "His Honor asks if you want to state your case."

"Huh?"

"Do you wish to state your case from the witness-chair? Since you did not employ counsel, do you wish to state your own case?"

"Nit."

"Look up here, my girl. I am the judge, trying to help you."

"Aw!"

"Is this your first offense?"

"Well, it's my offense, ain't it?"

"Address the court properly. Are you intoxicated or only slightly dizzy?"

"He lied about Cora Kinealy. He lied — that little skunk lied."

"Didn't you ask him to go there with you?"

"Sure; but he's no amachure."

"Are you?"

"What?"

"An amateur?"

"No, this Jane ain't."

"Will you go quietly into the next room with the matron and tell her all about it? The court does not want to have to deal too harshly with a girl like you. Do you want to engage counsel and have your case go over? If there is a chance, I don't want to have to send a girl like you away."

"Aw, you—you're a poodle and a great Dane!"

"Ten days," said the judge, rather wearily.

The bridge officer took up the next slip from the pile of them, his voice the droning quality of a bee bumbling through sultry air:

"Maizie Smith. Officer Jerry Dinwiddie."

Spring and her annual epidemic of aching hearts and aching joints had advanced ten days and ten degrees. The season's first straw replacement of derby had been noted by press. The city itched in

its last days of woolens and drank sassafras tea for nine successive mornings. A commuter wore the first sweet sprig of lilac. The slightly East Sixties took to boarding up house-fronts into bland, eyeless masks. The very East Sixties began to smell.

When a strangely larger-eyed, strangely thinner, a whitened and somehow a tightened Stella Schump drew up, those ten days later, before the little old row with the little old iron balconies, there was already in the ridiculous patches of front yards a light-green powdering of grass, and from the door-bell of her own threshold there hung quite a little spray of roses, waxy white against a frond of fern and a fold of black. Deeper within that threshold, at the business of flooding its floor with a run of water from a tipped pail and sweeping harshly into it, was the vigorous, bony silhouette of Mrs. O'Connor, landlady.

For the second that it took her presence to be felt, Miss Schump stood there trembling, all of a sudden more deeply and more rapidly. Then, Mrs. O'Connor leaned out, bare arms folded atop her broom.

"So!" she said, a highly imperfect row of lower teeth seeming to jut out, and her voice wavy with brogue and vibrant to express all its scorn. "So!"

"Mrs. O'Connor—"

"So! Ye've come back in time for the buryin'! Faith, an' it's a foine toime for the showin'-up of the chief mourner! Faith now it is!"

"Mrs. O'Connor—"

"Ain't ye ashamed? Ain't ye ashamed before the Lord to face your Maker?"

"Please—please—Mrs. O'Connor—what—what—"

"The pasty-faced lyin' ways of ye! I can see now how ye look what ye are! I'd have believed it as soon of my own. It's the still water that run deep in ye, is the way your girl friend put it. The hussy under that white complexion of yours! Your sainted mither! Oh, ain't ye ashamed in the name of the Lord to face your Maker?"

"O God—please what—"

"Your sainted mither! Niver, after that letter from ye the next night after her scourin' the city, a whimper more out of her—"

"I wrote—I wrote—they gimme a stamp—I wrote—how— Where is she?"

"A cousin had called ye sudden-like for sickness was how she put it. Faith and me niver once a-smellin' the mice, the way she lay there, waitin', waitin' day after day, doubled up in the joints and waitin' for thim ten days to pass—"

"O God!"

"I found her in bed yisterday, a-clutchin' the letter, or niver to my own dyin' would I have known the shameful truth of it. It's screw open her poor hands I had to, for the readin' of the letter that had been eatin' 'er for all them days of waitin'. Ye hussy! Ye jailbird—and me niver thinkin' but what it was the sick cousin! Me niver smellin' the mice! Your own girl friend, neither. Ye hussy! Jailbird!"

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"It's only because she was sainted I'm lettin' ye up in on her. She layin' up there, waitin'. Strangers

that crossed her poor hands on her poor breast and strangers that laid her out. Niver even a priest called in on her. She a-layin' up there, waitin'—the Lord have mercy on your soul! If ye ain't afraid before the Lord to look on her, come up. It's thankin' God I am she can't open her eyes to see ye."

Hands clutching her throat, Miss Schump remained standing there on the sun-drenched steps, gazing after the figure receding into the musty gloom of the hallway. She wanted to follow, but instead could only stand there, repeating and repeating:

"O my God! O my God! God! God! What have I done? What have I done? Mamma—mamma—mamma! O my God! What? What—"

In the pyramidal plot-structure of this story the line of descent is by far the sheerer. Short-story correspondence-schools would call it the brief downward action leading to dénouement.

With Stella Schump it was almost a straight declivity. There were days of the black kind of inertia when to lift the head from its sullen inclination to rest chin on chest was not to be endured. There was actually something sick in the eyes, little cataracts of gray cloud seeming to float across. She would sit hunched and looking out of them so long and so unseeingly that her very stare seemed to sleep.

She had removed the stick or two that remained unsold to a little rear room high up in a large, damp-

smelling lodging-house on West Twentieth Street, within view of a shipping-pier. There was a sign inserted in the lower front window:

ROOMS. LIGHT HOUSEKEEPING.

INQUIRE WITHIN.

She would sit in that room, so heavy with its odor of mildew, her window closed against the long, sweetly warm days, hunched dumbly on the cot-edge and staring into the stripe and vine, stripe and vine of the wall-paper design, or lie back when the ache along her spine began to set in. There were occasional ventures to a corner bake-shop for raisin rolls and to the delicatessen next door for a quarter-pound of Bologna sausage sliced into slivers while she waited. She would sit on the cot-edge munching alternately from sliver to roll, gulping through a throat that was continually tight with wanting to cry, yet would not relax for that relief.

There was little attempt for employment except when the twenty dollars left from the sale of effects and funeral expenses began to dwindle. She would wake up nights, sweaty with the nightmare that her room was some far-off ward for incorrigibles and that one of the strange, veiny-nosed inmates was filching her small leather bag from beneath her pillow.

When her little roll had flattened finally down to five one-dollar bills she took to daily and conscientiously buying morning papers and scanning want-advertisements as she stood at the news-stand, answering first those that were within walking-distance.

She would make a five-block détour of the Criterion rather than pass the nearer to it.

Once, returning after a fruitless tour of the smaller department stores, and borne along by the six-o'clock tide of Sixth Avenue, her heart leaped up at sight of Miss Cora Kinealy, homeward bound on her smart tall heels that clicked, arm in arm with Mabel Runyan of the notions. Standing there with her folded newspaper hugged to her and the small hand-bag dangling, Stella Schump gazed after.

It was not only the lack of references or even of experience that conspired against her every effort at employment. It was the lack of luster to the eye, an absolutely new tendency to tiptoe, a furtive lookout over her shoulder, a halting tongue, that, upon the slightest questioning, would stutter for words. Where there were application-blanks to be filled in she would pore inkily over them and, after a while, slyly crunch hers up in her hand and steal out. She was still pinkly and prettily clean, and her hair with its shining mat of plaits, high of gloss, but one Saturday half-holiday, rather than break into her last bill, she ate a three-cent frankfurter-sausage sandwich from off a not quite immaculate push-cart, leaning forward as she bit into it to save herself from the ooze of mustard. Again she had the sense of Cora Kinealy hurrying along the opposite side of the street on the tall heels that clicked. She let fall the bun into the gutter and stood there trembling.

She obtained, one later afternoon, at the instance of a window-card, the swabbing of the tiled floor

of an automobile show-room. She left before her first hour was completed, crying, her finger-tips stinging, two nails broken.

Finally came that chimera of an hour when she laid down her last coin for the raisin rolls. She ate them on the cot-edge. And then, because her weekly dollar-and-twenty-five-cent room rent fell due that evening, she wrapped two fresh and self-laundered waists, some white but unlacy underwear, a mound of window-dried handkerchiefs, a little knitted shoulder-shawl so long worn by her mother, her tooth-brush and tube of paste, and all her sundry little articles no less indispensable, into a white-paper package. There were left a short woolen petticoat, too cumbersome to include, the small wooden rocker and lamp with the china shade which she had rather unexplainably held out from the dealer's inventory. She closed the door softly on them one evening and, parcel in hand, tiptoed down the stonily cold halls and out into a street of long, thin, high-stooped houses. Outside in the May evening it was as black, as softly deep, as plushy as a pansy. She walked swiftly into it as if with destination. But after five or six of the long cross-town blocks her feet began to lag. She stood for a protracted moment outside a drug-store window, watching the mechanical process of a pasteboard man stropping his razor; loitered to read the violent three-sheet outside a Third Avenue cinematograph. In the aura of white light a figure in a sweater and cap nudged up to her.

"Lonesome?"

She moved on.

In Stuyvesant Square were a first few harbingers of summer scattered here and there—couples forcing the gladsome season of the dim park bench; solitary brooders who can sit so long, so droop-shouldered, and so deeply in silence. On one of these benches, beside a slim, scant-skirted, light-spatted silhouette, Stella Schump sat finally down. It was ten o'clock. There was a sense of panic, which she felt mostly at her throat, rising in her. Then she would force herself into a state of quiet, hand on bundle, nictitating, as it were—eyes opening, eyes closing. The figure beside her slid over a bit, spreading the tiny width of skirt as if to reserve the space between them.

"Workin'?"

"Huh?"

"Lord!" she said, indicating Second Avenue with a nod. "The lane's like a morgue to-night."

"Cold, ain't it?" said Stella Schump, shivering with night damp.

A figure with a tilted derby came sauntering toward them.

"Lay off my territory. I seen him first."

"Oh—sure—yes—all right."

The place in between them was filled then, the tilted derby well forward and revealing a rear bulge of head. There was an indeterminate moment of silence broken by the slim-skirted silhouette.

"Where you goin'?"

Straightening, Miss Schump could hear more.

"No place. Where you goin'?"

"I'm cold."

"Buy you a drink?"

In the shaft of arc-light Miss Schump could see the little face framed in the wan curls lift and crinkle the nose to smile.

"Come on."

She watched them recede down the narrow asphalt of the parkway. At eleven o'clock, to lessen her stiffening of joints, she walked twice the circumference of the fenced-in inclosure, finally sitting again, this time beneath a gaunt oleander that was heavy with bud.

"O God!" she kept repeating, her stress growing. "O God! God! God!"

With the lateness, footfalls were growing more and more audible, the gong of a street-car sounding out three blocks down.

"O my God!" And then in rapid succession, closing her eyes and digging her finger-nails into her palms: "Mamma! Mamma! Mamma!"

She wanted and wanted to cry, but her throat would not let her, and so she sat and sat.

There were still occasional figures moving through the little lanes and a couple or two deep in the obscurity of benches. After another while, at the remote end of her own bench, a figure sat down, lighting a pipe. She watched him pu-pu-pup. At half after eleven she slid along the bench.

"Where you goin'?"

He turned to look down.

"Eh?"

"Where you goin'?"

"No place."

"I'm cold."

"Pu-pu-pup."

"I am."

"Pu-pu-pup."

She leaned around, trying to bring her face to front his and to lift her nose to a little wrinkly smile.

"Aw, you!"

"Go home and go to bed," he said. "A nice-appearin' girl like you ought to be ashamed."

"I—ain't."

"Run along."

"Where?"

"You're barkin' up the wrong tree."

She fell silent. A chill raced through her.

"O God!" she began, under her breath. "O God! God!" Then: "Mamma! Mamma! Mamma!"

"You *are* cold," he said, reaching out to pinch her jacket sleeve. "That's a warm coat. Where do you live?"

"Lemme alone," she said, staring out before her as if she were seeing the stripe and vine, stripe and vine.

"You got the shivers," he said. "Better go home."

"Lemme alone."

"Ain't there no way you girls can learn to behave yourselves? Here"—digging down into his pocket—"here."

"No."

"Where you live?"

"I dunno. I dunno."

"You surely know where you live."

She looked up at him in one of the rare moments of opening wide her eyes.

"I tell you I dunno."

"What's in there?"

"My—my clothes."

"Let's see."

She plucked at the knot, drawing back for him to lean to see the top layer of neatly folded waist.

"Don't," she said, withdrawing it quickly from his touch.

"Why," he said, "you poor little kid! What's got you into this mess?"

At that in his voice, such a quick, a thick, a hot layer of tears sprang to her eyes that she could not relax her throat for words.

"What got you in?"

"I—I—I dunno."

"Aw, now, yes, you do know. Try to think—take your time—what got you in?"

"I—I—can't—"

"Yes, you can. Go on; I ain't lookin' at you."

He turned off to an angle.

Her first sob burst from her, tearing her throat and ending in a tremolo of moans in her throat.

"Now, now," he said, still in profile; "that won't do. Not for a sensible little girl like you. Easy—easy—take your time—"

"You see, mister—you see, it was my—my mamma—my beautiful, darling mamma—O God!—"

"Yes, yes; it was your mamma—and then what?"

"It was my mamma, my beautiful, darling mamma!

What 'll I do, mister? I can't make it up to her. No way—nohow. She's gone—she's gone—"

"Easy—easy—try to keep easy."

"I used to kiss her hands when they was embroiderin'. I used to grease 'em for her all night when she screamed with the pain of 'em. I used to scream at night, too, when I was doin' my time—her there waitin'—she died alone—there waitin'—the letter they gave me the stamp for—I—I was crazy with scare when I wrote it—O God!—mamma—mamma—mamma!"

"'Sh-h-h! 'Sh-h-h! Try to keep easy."

"It was this way—O God, how was it?—it was this way—you see, me and my mamma and sometimes a friend—Cora Jones—no—no—no—Cora Kinealy—we used to sit in the lamplight—no—no—first, I was in the shoes—the children's shoes—they used to come in, little kiddies with their toes all kicked out wantin' new shoes—cute little baby-shoes that I loved to try on 'em. My friend—Cora—my friend— O God!—"

"Now, now, like a good girl—go on."

"My friend Cora—my darling little mamma—I never knew nothing about anything except me and my mamma, we—it worried her that I didn't have it like—like other girls—I—you see—you see, mister?"

"Yes, yes, I see."

Her voice, so jerked up with sobs, quieted down to a drone finally, to a low drone that talked on and on through an hour, through two. There were large, shining beads of tears flowing constantly

from her cheeks, but she wiped at them unceasingly with her handkerchief and talked evenly through a new ease in her throat.

"She died, mister," she ended up finally, turning her salt-bitten eyes full upon him; "she died of that letter written when I was so full of a scared craziness from bein' in—in that place—that terrible, terrible place—but she didn't die believin' me bad. I never seen her alive again to hear it from her, but there in her—her little coffin I—I seen it in her little face, all sunk, she didn't believe it—she didn't die thinkin' me bad. Mister, did she? Did she?"

He did not answer, sitting there, drooped forward for so long that finally she put out her hand to touch his.

"Did she?"

He did not turn his face, but reached around, inclosing her wrist, pressing it, gripping it.

"Did she, mister?"

"No, no," he said, finally, "no, Stella; she didn't die thinkin' you bad."

She sighed out, eyes closing, and her quivering lips falling quiet.

"Do you think I'm bad, mister?"

"No, Stella! No! No! No! My God, no!"

"I'm cold."

"Come."

"Where?"

"I'm goin' to take you across the street there to the Young Women's Shelter Home for to-night. Just across there. See the sign? Don't be afraid, Stella. Please don't be afraid."

"I ain't."

He retied the white-paper package, tucking it up under one arm.

"Come, Stella."

She rose, swaying for the merest second. His arm shot out.

"I'm all right," she said, steadying herself, smilingly, shamefacedly, but relaxing gratefully enough to the flung support.

"Don't be afraid, Stella," he said. "I'm here. I'm here."

His forearm where the cuff had ridden up bore a scar, as if molten lead had run a fiery, a dagger-shaped, an excoriating course.

WHITE GOODS

ON a slope a white sprinkling of wood anemones lay spread like a patch of linen bleaching in the sun. From a valley a lark cut a swift diagonal upward with a coloratura burst of song. A stream slipped its ice and took up its murmur where it had left off. A truant squelched his toes in the warm mud and let it ooze luxuriantly over and between them.

A mole stirred in its hole, and because spring will find a way, even down in the bargain basement of the Titanic Store, which is far below the level of the mole, Sadie Barnet, who had never seen a wood anemone and never sniffed of thaw or the wet wild smell of violets, felt the blood rise in her veins like sap, and across the aisle behind the white-goods counter Max Meltzer writhed in his woolens, and Sadie Barnet, presiding over a bin of specially priced mill-ends out mid-aisle between the white goods and the muslin underwear, leaned toward him, and her smile was as vivid as her lips.

"Say, Max, guess why I think you're like a rubber band."

Classic Delphi was never more ready with ambiguous retort.

Behind a stack of Joy-of-the-Loom bed-sheets, Max Meltzer groped for oracular divination, and his heart-beats fluttered in his voice.

"Like a rubber band?"

"Yeh."

"Give up."

"Aw, give a guess."

"Well, I don't know, Miss Sadie, unless—unless it's because I'm stuck on you."

Do not, ascetic reader, gag at the unsocratic plane. True, Max Meltzer had neither the grain nor the leisure of a sophist, a capacity for tenses or an appreciation of Kant. He had never built a bridge, led a Bible class, or attempted the first inch of the five-foot bookshelf. But on a two-figure salary he subscribed an annual donation to a skin-and-cancer hospital, wore non-reversible collars, and maintained a smile that turned upward like the corners of a cycle moon. Remember, then, ascetic reader, that a rich man once kicked a leper; Kant's own heart, that it might turn the world's heart outward, burst of pain; and in the granite cañon of Wall Street, one smile in every threescore and ten turns upward.

Sadie Barnet met Max Meltzer's cycle-moon smile with the blazing eyes of scorn, and her lips, quivering to a smile, met in a straight line that almost ironed out the curves.

" 'Cause you're stuck on me! That's a swell guess. Gee! you're as funny as a sob, you are."

The words scuttered from her lips like sharp hailstones and she glanced at him sidewise over a

hump of uplifted shoulder and down the length of one akimbo arm.

" 'Cause you're stuck on me! Huh!"

Max Meltzer leaned across a counter display of fringed breakfast napkins.

"Ain't that a good reason, Miss Sadie? It's a true one."

"You're one swell little guesser, you are *not.* You couldn't get inside a riddle with a can-opener. 'Cause you're stuck on me! Gee!"

"Well, I am."

"I didn't ask you why you was like a bottle of glue. I asked you why you was like a rubber band."

"Aw, I give up, Miss Sadie."

" 'Cause you're so stretchy, see? 'Cause you're so stretchy you'll yawn your arm off if you don't watch it."

Max Meltzer collapsed in an attitude of mock prostration against a stock-shelf.

"Gee! that must have been cracked before the first nut."

"Smarty!"

Across the specially priced mill-ends she flashed the full line of her teeth, and with an intensity his features ill concealed he noted how sweet her throat as it arched.

"It's the spring fever gets inside of me and makes me so stretchy, Miss Sadie. It's a good thing trade is slow down here in the basement to-day, because it's the same with me every year; the Saturday before spring-opening week I just get to feeling like all outdoors."

"Wait till you see me with a new red-satin bow stuck on my last summer's shape. Dee Dee's got to lend me the price for two yards of three-inch red-satin ribbon for my spring opening."

His breath rose in his throat.

"I bet you look swell in red, Miss Sadie. But a girl like you looks swell in anything."

"Red's my color. Dee Dee says my mamma was a gay one, too, when it came to color. Had to have a red bow pinned somewheres around all the months she was in bed and—and up to the very night she died. Gimme red every time. Dee Dee's the one that's always kicking against red; she says I got too flashy taste."

"Say, if she keeps bossing and bossing at you, what do you keep on living with her for?"

"Wouldn't you live with your own mother's sister if she raised you from a kid? What am I going to do, put her in cold storage, now that her eyes are going back on her? Up in the ribbons she can't hardly keep her colors graduated no more, that's how blind she's getting. Only yesterday a dame brought back some lavender ribbon and wiped up the whole department with Dee Dee for putting it over on her as blue. What am I going to do?"

"Honest, Miss Sadie, I didn't know that she was your aunt and that her eyes was bad. I've seen you two together a lot and noticed her thick lenses, but I just didn't think."

"Well, now I'm telling you."

"I just thought she was some old girl up in the

ribbons you was living with for company. Honest, I didn't know she had bad eyes. Gee!"

"No, they ain't bad. Only she's so blind she reads her paper upside down and gets sore if you tell her about it."

"And me thinking she was nothing but a near-sighted old grouch with a name like a sparrow."

Miss Barnet laughed with an upward trill.

"Dee Dee ain't her real name. When I was a kid and she took me to raise, that's the way I used to pronounce Aunt Edith. Gee! you don't think Dee Dee was the name they sprinkled on her when they christened her, did you?"

Max Meltzer leaned to the breath of her laughter as if he would fill his lungs with it.

"Gee! but you're a cute little lady when you laugh like that."

"Say, and ain't you the freshie! Just because you're going to be promoted to buyer for your department won't get your picture in the Sunday supplement. No white-goods buyer I know of ever had to build white marble libraries or present a bread-line to the city to get rid of his pin-money."

"I bet you was a cute little black-eyed, red-cheeked little youngster, alrighty."

"I wasn't so worse. Like I tell Dee Dee, the way she's held me down and indoors evenings, it's a wonder a kid like me grew up with any pep at all."

"Poor little lady!"

"It's like Dee Dee says, though. I never was cut out for life behind the counter. Gee! I'd soak my

pillow in gasolene every night in the week if it would make me dream I'm automobiling."

"Poor little lady!"

"Say, ain't it hot? With the Opening on Monday, they better get the fans working. Last year three girls keeled. Honest, sometimes I think I'd rather spend the summer under the daisies out on the hill than down here in this basement."

"Don't I wish I had an auto to take you spinning in to-night."

"You ought to see the flier a friend of mine has got. A Mercury Six with a limousine top like a grand-opera box."

"Your—your—friend?"

"Yes. He's that slick-looking, little fat fellow that's a cousin to Mamie Grant up in the ready-to-wears. He was down here talking to me the other day."

"I seen him."

"Gee! you ought to feel yourself in his Mercury Six. 'Lemme die,' I says to him the last time I was in it. 'Just lemme close my eyes right in here and die happy,' I says, cuddled up in the red-leather seat with a cornucopia of daffodils tickling my nose and a street-car full of strap-hangers riding alongside of us."

"I—I guess if you got swell friends like that, a boat excursion down the river 'ain't got much of a sound for you."

"He says he's got a launch in summer—"

"Honest, Miss Sadie, I—I just been trying for the better part of two weeks to ask permission if I

could come and call on you some evening, Miss Sadie, but—"

"Whoops! ain't he the daredevil!"

"The first boat of the season, Miss Sadie, a swell new one they call the *White Gull*, goes down to Coney to-night, and, it being real springtime, and you feeling kind of full of it, I thought maybe, it being the first boat of the season, maybe you would take a river ride this grand April night, Miss Sadie."

Her glance slanted toward him, full of quirks.

"My aunt Dee Dee, Mr. Meltzer, she's right strict with me. She don't think I ought to keep company with any boys that don't come to see me first at my house."

"I know it, Miss Sadie; that's the right way to do it, but I think I can get around her all right. Wasn't she down here in the basement the day I first heard about my promotion, and didn't she give me the glad hand and seem right friendly to me? I can get around her all right, Miss Sadie. I can always tell if a person likes me or not."

"Anyways, if her eyes ain't too bad, Mr. Meltzer, I got a date with my friend if his car is out of the shop from having the limousine top taken off. We —we're going for a little spin."

A quick red belied her insouciance and she made a little foray into the bin of mill-ends.

"Gee! if I've made three sales this livelong day I don't know nothing about two of them."

Max Meltzer met her dancing gaze, pinioning it with his own quiet eyes.

"You're right to pick out the lucky fellows who

can buy a good time. A little girl like you ought to have every enjoyment there is. If I could give it to you, do you think I would let the other fellows beat me to it? The best ain't none too good for a little lady like you."

"Aw, Mr. Meltzer!" Her bosom filled and waned. "Aw, Mr. Meltzer!"

"I mean it."

An electric bell grilled through his words. Miss Barnet sprang reflexly from the harness of an eight-hour day.

"Aw, looka, and I wanted to sneak up before closing and get Dee Dee to snip me two yards of red satin, and she won't cut an inch after the bell. Ain't that luck for you? Ain't that luck?"

Her lips drew to a pout.

"Lemme get it for you, Miss Sadie. I know a girl up in the ribbons—"

"No, no, Mr. Meltzer. I—I got to charge it to Dee Dee, and, anyways, she gets mad like anything if I keep her waiting. I gotta go. 'Night, Mr. Meltzer! 'Night!"

She was off through the maze of the emptying store, in the very act of pinning on her little hat with its jaunty imitation fur pompon, and he breathed in as she passed, as if of the perfume of her personality.

At the ribbon counter on the main floor the last of a streamlet of outgoing women detached herself from the file as Miss Barnet ascended the staircase.

"Hurry up, Sadie."

"Dee Dee! How'd you girls up here get on your duds so soon? I thought maybe if I'd hurry upstairs you—you'd find time to cut me a two-yard piece of three-inch red satin for my hat, Dee Dee—to-morrow being Sunday. Two yards, Dee Dee, and that 'll make two-sixty-nine I owe you. Aw, Dee Dee, it won't take a minute, to-morrow Sunday and all! Aw, Dee Dee!"

Miss Barnet slid ingratiating fingers into the curve of the older woman's arm; her voice was smooth as salve.

"Aw, Dee Dee, who ever heard of wearing fur on a hat in April? I gotta stick a red bow on my last summer's sailor, Dee Dee."

Miss Edith Worte stiffened so that the muscles sprang out in the crook of her arm and the cords in her long, yellowing neck. Years had dried on her face, leaving ravages, and through her high-power spectacles her pale eyes might have been staring through film and straining to see.

"Please, Dee Dee!"

Miss Barnet held backward, a little singsong note of appeal running through her voice.

Miss Worte jerked forward toward the open door. April dusk, the color of cold dish-water, showed through it. Dusk in the city comes sadly, crowding into narrow streets and riddled with an immediate quick-shot of electric bulbs.

"'Ain't you got no sense a-tall? 'Ain't you got no sense in that curly head of yourn but ruination notions?"

"Aw, Dee Dee!"

They were in the flood tide which bursts through the dam at six o'clock like a human torrent flooding the streets, then spreading, thinning, and finally seeping into homes, hall bedrooms, and Harlem flats.

Miss Edith Worte turned her sparse face toward the down-town tide and against a light wind that tasted of rain and flapped her skirts around her thin legs.

"Watch out, Dee Dee! Step down; there's a curb."

"I don't need you. It's lots you care if I go blind on the spot."

"Dee Dee!"

"God! if I didn't have nothing to worry me but red ribbons! I told the doctor to-day, while he was putting the drops in my eyes, that if he'd let me go blind I—I—"

"Now, now, Dee Dee! Ain't you seeing better these last few days?"

"If you had heard what the doctor told me to-day when he put the drops in my eyes you'd have something to think about besides red ribbon, alrighty."

"I forgot, Dee Dee, to-day was your eye-doctor day. He's always scarin' you up. Just don't pay no attention. I forgot it was your day."

"Sure you forgot. But you won't forget if I wake up alone in the dark some day."

"Dee Dee!"

"You won't forget then. You won't forget to nag me even then for duds to go automobiling with fly men that can't bring you no good."

"Dee Dee, I 'ain't been but one night this week. I been saving up all my nights for—for to-night."

"To-night. Say, I can't keep you from going to the devil on skates if—"

"It's only the second time this week, Dee Dee, and I—I promised. He'll have the limousine top off to-night—and feel, it is just like summer. A girl's gotta have a little something once in a while."

"What do I gotta have? What do I gotta have but slave and work?"

"It's different with you, Dee Dee. You're older even than my mamma was, and didn't you say when you and her was girls together there wasn't a livelier two sisters? Now didn't you, Dee Dee?"

"In a respectable way, yes. But there wasn't the oily-mouthed, bald-headed divorced man alive, with little rat eyes and ugly lips, who could have took me or your mamma out auto-riding before or after dark. We was working-girls, too, but there wasn't a man didn't take off his hat to us, even if he was bald-headed and it was twenty below zero."

"Aw!"

"Yes, 'aw'! You keep running around with the kind of men that don't look at a girl unless she's served up with rum-sauce and see where it lands you. Just keep running if you want to, but my money don't buy you no red ribbons to help to drive you to the devil!"

"The way you keep fussing at me, when I don't even go to dances like the other girls! I—sometimes I just wish I was dead. The way I got to

watch the clock like it was a taximeter the whole time I'm out anywheres. It's the limit. Even Max Meltzer gimme the laugh to-day."

"You'd never hear me say watch the clock if you'd keep company with a boy like Max Meltzer. A straight, clean boy with honest intentions by a girl lookin' right out of his face. You let a boy like Max Meltzer begin to keep steady with you and see what I say. You don't see no yellow streak in his face; he's as white as the goods he sells."

"I know. I know. You think now because he's going to be made buyer for the white goods in September he's the whole show. Gee! nowadays that ain't so muchy much for a fellow to be."

"No, I think the kind of fellows that fresh Mamie Grant gets you acquainted with are muchy much. I'm strong for the old rat-eyed sports like Jerry Beck, that 'ain't got a honest thought in his head. I bet he gives you the creeps, too, only you're the kind of a girl, God help you, that's so crazy for luxury you could forget the devil had horns if he hid 'em under a automobile cap."

"Sure I am. I 'ain't seen nothing but slaving and drudging and pinching all my life, while other girls are strutting the Avenue in their furs and sleeping mornings as long as they want under eider-down quilts. Sure, when a man like Jerry Beck comes along with a carriage-check instead of a Subway-ticket I can thaw up to him like a water-ice, and I ain't ashamed of it, neither."

They turned into a narrow aisle of street lined with unbroken rows of steep, narrow-faced houses.

Miss Worte withdrew her arm sharply and plunged ahead, her lips wry and on the verge of trembling.

"When a girl gets twenty, like you, it ain't none of my put-in no more. Only I hope to God your mother up there is witness that if ever a woman slaved to keep a girl straight and done her duty by her it was me. That man 'ain't got no good intentions by—"

"Oh, ain't you—ain't you a mean-thinking thing, ain't you? What kind of a girl do you think I am? If he didn't have the right intentions by me do you think—"

"Oh, I guess he'll marry you if he can't get you no other way. Them kind always do if they can't help themselves. A divorced old guy like him, with a couple of kids and his mean little eyes, knows he's got to pay up if he wants a young girl like you. Oh, I— Ouch—oh—oh!"

"Dee Dee, take my arm. That was only an ash-can you bumped into. It's the drops he puts in your eyes makes 'em so bad to-night, I guess. Go on, take my arm, Dee Dee. Here we are home. Lemme lead you up-stairs. It's nothing but the drops, Dee Dee."

They turned in and up and through a foggy length of long hallway. Spring had not entered here. At the top of a second flight of stairs a slavey sat back on her heels and twisted a dribble of gray water from her cloth into her bucket. At the last and third landing an empty coal-scuttle stood just outside a door as if nosing for entrance.

"Watch out, Dee Dee, the scuttle. Lemme go in

first. Gee! it's cold indoors and warm out, ain't it? Wait till I light up. There!"

"Lemme alone. I can see."

An immemorial federation of landladies has combined against Hestia to preserve the musty traditions of the furnished room. Love in a cottage is fostered by subdivision promoters and practised by commuters on a five-hundred-dollars-down, monthly-payment basis. Marble halls have been celebrated in song, but the furnished room we have with us always at three cents per agate line.

You with your feet on your library fender, stupefied with contentment and your soles scorching, your heart is not black; it is only fat. How can it know the lean formality of the furnished room? Your little stenographer, who must wear a smile and fluted collars on eight dollars a week, knows it; the book agent at your door, who earns eighteen cents on each *Life of Lincoln*, knows it. Chambermaids know it when they knock thrice and only the faint and nauseous fumes of escaping gas answer them through the plugged keyhole. Coroners know it.

Sadie Barnet and Edith Worte knew it, too, and put out a hand here and there to allay it. A comforting spread of gay chintz covered the sag in their white iron bed; a photograph or two stuck upright between the dresser mirror and its frame, and tacked full flare against the wall was a Japanese fan, autographed many times over with the gay personnel of the Titanic Store's annual picnic.

"Gee! Dee Dee, six-twenty already! I got to hurry. Unhook me while I sew in this ruching."

"Going for supper?"

"Yeh. He invited me. This is cottage-pudding night; tell old lady Finch when I ain't home for supper you got two desserts coming to you."

"I don't want no supper."

"Aw, now, Dee Dee!"

Miss Worte dropped her dark cape from her shoulders, hung it with her hat on a door peg, and sat heavily on the edge of the bed.

"God! my feet!"

"Soak 'em."

Miss Barnet peeled off her shirt-waist. Her bosom, strong and flat as a boy's, rose white from her cheaply dainty under-bodice; at her shoulders the flesh began to deepen, and her arms were round and full of curves.

"Here, Dee Dee, I'm so nervous when I hurry. You sew in this ruche; you got time before the supper-bell. See, right along the edge like that."

Miss Worte aimed for the eye of the needle, moistening the end of the thread with her tongue and her fluttering fingers close to her eyes.

"God! I—I just 'ain't got the eyes no more. I can't see, Sadie; I can't find the needle."

Sadie Barnet paused in the act of brushing out the cloud of her dark hair, and with a strong young gesture ran the thread through the needle, knotting its end with a quirk of thumb and forefinger.

"It's the drops, Dee Dee, and this gaslight, all

blurry from the curling-iron in the flame, makes you see bad."

Miss Worte nodded and closed her eyes as if she would press back the tears and let them drip inward.

"Yeh, I know. I know."

"Sure! Here, lemme do it, Dee Dee. I won't stay out late, dearie, if your eyes are bad. We're only going out for a little spin."

Miss Worte lay back on the chintz bedspread and turned her face to the wall.

"I should worry if you come home or if you don't—all the comfort you are to me."

"You say that to me many more times and you watch and see what I do; you watch and see."

"The sooner the better."

In the act of fluting the soft ruche about her neck, so that her fresh little face rose like a bud from its calyx, Miss Barnet turned to the full length of back which faced her from the bed.

"That's just the way I feel about it—the sooner the better."

"Then we think alike."

"You 'ain't been such a holy saint to me that I got to pay up to you for it all my life."

"That's the thanks I get."

"You only raised me because you had to. I been working for my own living ever since I was so little I had to lie to the inspectors about my age."

"Except what you begged out of my wages."

"I been as much to you as you been to me and—and I don't have to stand this no longer. Sure I

can get out and—and the sooner the better. I'm sick of getting down on my knees to you every time I wanna squeeze a little good time out of life. I'm tired paying up for the few dollars you gimme out of your envelop. If I had any sense I—I wouldn't never take it from you, nohow, the way you throw it up to me all the time. The sooner the better is what I say, too; the sooner the better."

"That's the thanks I get; that's the—"

"Aw, I know all that line of talk by heart, so you don't need to ram it down me. You gotta quit insinuating about my ways to me. I'm as straight as you are and—"

"You—you—take off that ivory-hand breast-pin; that ain't yours."

"Sure I'll take it off, and this ruche you gimme the money to buy, and this red bracelet you gimme, and—and every old thing you ever gimme. Sure I'll take 'em all off. I wish I could take off these gray-top shoes you paid a dollar toward, and I would, too, if I didn't have to go barefoot. It's the last time I borrow from—"

"Aw, you commenced that line of talk when you was ten."

"I mean it."

"Well, if you do, take off them gloves that I bought for myself and you begged right off my hands. Just take 'em off and go barehanded with your little-headed friend; maybe he can buy—"

"You— Oh, I—I wish I was dead! I—I'll go barehanded to a snowball feast rather than wear your duds. There's your old gloves—there!"

Tears were streaming and leaving their ravages on the smooth surface of her cheeks.

"I just wish I—I was dead."

"Aw, no, you don't! There's him now, with a horn on his auto that makes a noise like the devil yelling! There's your little rat-eyed, low-lived fellow, now. You don't wish you was dead now, do you? Go to him and his two divorces and his little round head. That's where you belong; that's where girls on the road to the devil belong—with them kind. There he is now, waiting to ride you to the devil. He don't need to honk-honk so loud; he knows you're ready and waiting for him."

Miss Barnet fastened on her little hat with fingers that fumbled.

"Gimme—the key."

"Aw, no, you don't. When you come home to-night you knock; no more tiptoe, night-key business like last time. I knew you was lying to me about the clock."

"You gimme that key. I don't want you to have to get up, with all your kicking, to open the door for me. You gimme the key."

"If you wanna get in this room when you come home to-night, you knock like any self-respecting girl ain't afraid to do."

"You—oh—you!" With a shivering intake of breath Miss Barnet flung wide the door, slamming it after her until the windows and the blue-glass vase on the mantelpiece and Miss Worte, stretched full length on the bed, shivered.

Two flights down she flung open the front door.

There came from the curb the bleat of a siren, wild for speed.

Stars had come out, a fine powdering of them, and the moist evening atmosphere was sweet, even heavy. She stood for a moment in the embrasure of the door, scenting.

"Do I need my heavy coat, Jerry?"

The dim figure in the tonneau, with his arms flung out their length across the back of the seat, moved from the center to the side.

"No, you don't. Hurry up! I'll keep you warm if you need a coat. Climb in here right next to me, Peachy. Gimme that robe from the front there, George.

"Now didn't I say I was going to keep you warm? Quit your squirming, Touchy. I won't bite. Ready, George. Up to the Palisade Inn, and let out some miles there."

"Gee! Jerry, you got the limousine top off. Ain't this swell for summer?"

Mr. Jerome Beck settled back in the roomy embrasure of the seat and exhaled loudly, his shoulder and shoe touching hers.

She settled herself out of their range.

"Now, now, snuggle up a little, Peachy."

She shifted back to her first position.

"That's better."

"Ain't it a swell night?"

"Now we're comfy—eh?"

They were nosing through a snarl of traffic and over streets wet and slimy with thaw. Men with overcoats flung over their arms side-stepped the

snout of the car. Delicatessen and candy-shop doors stood wide open. Children shrilled in the grim shadows of thousand-tenant tenement-houses.

"Well, Peachy, how are you? Peachy is just the name for you, eh? 'Cause I'd like to take a bite right out of you—eh, Peachy? How are you?"

"Fine and—and dandy."

"Look at me."

"Aw!"

"Look at me, I say, you pretty little peach, with them devilish black eyes of yours and them lips that's got a cherry on 'em."

She met his gaze with an uncertain smile trembling on her lips.

"Honest, you're the limit."

"What's your eyes red for?"

"They—they ain't."

"Cryin'?"

"Like fun."

"You know what I'd do if I thought you'd been crying? I'd just kiss them tears right away."

"Yes, you would *not*."

"Little devil!"

"Quit calling me that." But she colored as if his tribute had been a sheath of lilies.

They veered a corner sharply, skidding on the wet asphalt and all but grazing the rear wheels of a recreant taxicab.

"Gad, George! you black devil you, why don't you watch out what you're doing?"

"But, suh, I—"

"None of your black back-talk."

"Jerry!" She was shivering, and a veil of tears formed over her hot, mortified eyes. "Gee! what are you made of? You seen he couldn't help it when that taxi turned into us so sudden."

He relaxed against her. "Aw, did I scare the little Peachy? That's the way they gotta be handled. I ain't ready by a long shot to let a black devil spill my brains."

"'Shh-h. He couldn't—"

"Sure he could, if he watched. He's a bargain I picked up cheap, anyways, 'cause he's lame and can't hold down heavy work. And bargains don't always pay. But I'll break his black back for him if— Aw, now, now, did I scare the little peach? Gee! I couldn't do nothing but kill *you* with kindness if you was driving for me. I'd just let you run me right off this road into the Hudson Ocean if you was driving for me."

They were out toward the frayed edge of the city, where great stretches of sign-plastered vacant lots began to yawn between isolated patches of buildings and the river ran close enough alongside of them to reflect their leftward lights. She smiled, but as if her lips were bruised.

"It ain't none of my put-in, but he couldn't help it, and I hate for you to yell at anybody like that, Jerry."

"Aw, aw, did I scare the little Peachy? Watch me show the little Tootsie how nice I can be when I want to— Aw—aw!"

"Quit."

She blinked back the ever-recurring tears.

"All tired out, too; all tired out. Wait till you see what I'm going to buy you to-night. A great big beefsteak with mushrooms as big as dollars and piping-hot German fried potatoes and onions. M-m-m-m! And more bubbles than you can wink your eye at. Aw—aw, such poor cold little hands, and no gloves for such cold little hands! Here, lemme warm 'em. Wouldn't I just love to wrap a little Peachy like you up in a great big fur coat and put them little cold hands in a great big muff and hang some great big headlight earrings in them little bittsie ears. Wouldn't I, though. M-m-m-m! Poor cold little hands!"

Her wraith of a smile dissolved in a spurt of hot tears which flowed over her words.

"Gee! Ain't I the nut to—to cry? I—I'll be all right in a minute."

"I knew when I seen them red eyes the little Peachy wasn't up to snuff, and her cute little devilishlike ways. What's hurting you, Tootsie? Been bounced? You should worry. I'm going to steal you out of that cellar, anyways. Been bounced?"

"N-no."

"The old hag 'ain't been making it hot for you, has she?"

"Sh-she—"

"Gad! that old hag gets my fur up. I had a mother-in-law once tried them tricks on me till I learned her they wouldn't work. But the old hag of yourn—"

"It's her eyes; the doctor must have scared her up again to-day. When she gets scared like that

about 'em she acts up so, honest, sometimes I—I just wish I was dead. She don't think a girl oughtta have no life."

"Forget it. Just you wait. She's going to wake up some morning soon and find a little surprise party for herself. I know just how to handle an old bird like her."

"Sometimes she's just so good to me, and then again, when she gets sore like to-night, and with her nagging and fussing at me, I don't care if she is my aunt, I just *hate* her."

"We're going to give her a little surprise party." Beneath the lap robe his hand slid toward hers. She could feel the movement of the arm that directed it and her own shrank away.

"But ain't I the limit, Jerry, airing my troubles to you, like you was a policeman."

"Now, now—"

"Quit! Leggo my hand."

They were spinning noiselessly along a road that curved for the moment away from the river into the velvet shadows of trees. He leaned forward suddenly, enveloping her.

"I got it. Why don't you lemme kidnap you, kiddo?"

"What—"

"Lemme kidnap you to-night and give the old hag the surprise of her life when she wakes up and finds you stolen. I'm some little kidnapper when it comes to kidnapping, I am, kiddo. Say, wouldn't I like to take you riding all wrapped up in a fur coat with nothing but your cute little face sticking out."

"Aw, you're just fooling me."

"Fooling! Lemme prove it, to-night. Lemme kidnap you this very night. I—"

She withdrew stiff-backed against his embrace.

"Is—is that what you mean by—by kidnapping me?"

"Sure. There ain't nothing I'd rather do. Are you on, Peaches? A sensible little queen like you knows which side her bread is buttered on. There ain't nothing I want more than to see you all bundled up in a fur coat with—headlights in your little bittsie pink ears."

She sprang the width of the seat from him.

"You— What kind of a girl do you think I am? O God! What kind of a girl does he think I am? Take me home—take me— What kind of a girl do you think I am?"

He leaned toward her with a quick readjustment of tone.

"Just what I said, Peachy. What I meant was I'd marry you to-night if we could get a license. I'd just kidnap you to-night if—if we could get one."

"You—you didn't mean that."

"Sure I did, Peachy. Say, with a little girl of my own I ain't one of them guys that you think I am. Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Peachy—now ain't you?"

The color flowed back into her face and her lips parted.

"Jerry— Only a girl like me's got to be careful—that was all I meant, Jerry. Jerry!"

He scooped her in his short arms and kissed her lips, with her small face crumpled up against his shoulder, and she lay quiescent enough in his embrace. Wind sang in her ears as they rushed swiftly and surely along the oiled road, but the two small fists she pressed against his coat lapels did not relax.

"Aw, now, Peachy, you mustn't treat a fellow cold no more! Ain't I going to marry you? Ain't I going to set you up right in my house out in Newton Heights? Ain't I going to give you a swell ten-room house? Ain't you going to live right in the house with my girl, and ain't she going to have you for a little stepmother?"

"Jerry, the — the little girl. I wonder if she wants—"

"Sure she does. Her mother gets her every other month. I'd let her go for good if you don't want her, except it would do her mother too much good. The courts give her to me every other month and I'll have her down to the last minute of the last hour or bust."

"Jerry!"

"That's what I gotta keep up the house out there for. The court says I gotta give her a home, and that's why I want a little queen like you in it. Gad! Won't her mother throw a red-headed fit when she sees the little queen I picked! Gad!"

"Oh, Jerry, her your first wife and all! Won't it seem funny my going in her house and—and living with her kid."

"Funny nothing. Cloonan won't think it's funny

when I tell her she's finished running my house for me. Funny nothing. To-morrow's Sunday and I'm going to take you out in the afternoon and show you the place, and Monday, instead of going to your bargain bin, we're going down for a license, and you kiss the old hag good-by for me, too. Eh, how's that for one day's work?"

"Gee! and—and—Monday the spring opening and me not there! Jerry, I—I can't get over me being a lady in my own house. Me! Me that hates ugliness and ugly clothes and ugly living so. Me that hates street-cars and always even hated boat excursions 'cause they was poor folks' pleasures. Me a lady in my own house. Oh, Jerry!"

She quivered in his arms and he kissed her again with his moist lips pressed flat against hers.

"Ten rooms, Peachy—that's the way I do things."

They were curving up a gravel way, and through the lacy foliage of spring lights gleamed, and there came the remoter strains of syncopated music.

She sat up and brushed back her hair

"Is this the place?"

"Right-o! Now for that steak smothered in mushrooms, and, gad! I could manage a sweetbread salad on the side if you asked me right hard."

They drew up in the flood-light of the entrance.

"'Ain't I told you not to open the door for me, George? I don't need no black hand reaching back here to turn the handle for me. That don't make up for bad driving. Black hands off."

"Jerry!"

They alighted with an uncramping and unbending of limbs.

"How'd some Lynnhavens taste to you for a starter, Peachy?"

"Fine, whatever they are."

A liveried attendant bowed them up the steps.

A woman in blue velvet, her white arms bare to the shoulder and stars in her hair, paused in the doorway to drop her cloak. Her heavy perfume drifted out to meet them.

Sadie Barnet's clutch of her companion's arm quickened and her thoughts ran forward.

"Jerry—gee! wouldn't I look swell in—in a dress like that? Gee! Jerry, stars and all!"

The cords in the muscles of his arm rose under her fingers.

"Them ain't one-two-three-six to the duds I'm going to hang on you. I know her; she's an old-timer. Them duds ain't one-two-three-six."

"Gee—Jerry!"

In the heart of a silence as deep as a bottomless pool, with the black hours that tiptoe on the heels of midnight shrouding her like a nun's wimple, limbs trembling and her hands reluctant, Sadie Barnet knocked lightly at her door, once, twice, thrice, and between each rap her heart beat with twice its tempo against her breast.

Then her stealthy hand turned the white china knob and released it so that it sprang backward with a click.

"Who's that?"

"Me, Dee Dee."

Her voice was swathed in a whisper.

She could hear the plong of the bedspring, the patter of bare feet across the floor; feel the slight aperture of the opening door. She oozed through the slit.

"All right, Dee Dee."

"God! I—I must have been sound asleep. What time is it?"

"It isn't late, Dee Dee."

"Light the gas."

"I—I can undress in the dark."

"Light the gas."

"I—"

"Light it, I say."

"It's lit, Dee Dee."

The figure in the center of the room, in her high-necked, long-sleeved nightdress, her sparse hair drawn with unpleasant tension from her brow, her pale eyes wide, moved forward a step, one bare foot, calloused even across the instep, extended.

"Lit?"

"Dee Dee, what's the matter?"

"Gimme—my glasses."

She took them from Miss Barnet's trembling fingers and curved them about her ears.

"Quit your nonsense now and light the gas. I ain't in no humor for foolin'. Quit waving that little spark in front of me. Light the gas. I ain't going to look at the clock. I'm done worrying about your carryings-on. I'm done. Light the gas, Sadie, there's a good girl. Light the gas."

"Dee Dee! My God! Dee Dee, I—I tell you it's lit—big."

"There's a good girl, Sadie. Don't fool your old aunt."

"See, dearie, I ain't fooling. See, the gas-jet here beside the dresser. Look—I can't turn it no higher. Hear it sing and splutter. You ain't awake good yet, Dee Dee."

Silence—the ear-splitting silence that all in its brief moment is crammed with years and years upon years. A cold gray wash seemed suddenly to flow over Miss Worte's face.

"Put my finger next to the gas flame. You—you're lying to me to—to fool your old aunt. Lemme feel my finger get burnt."

They moved, these two, across the floor, their blanched faces straining ahead. With the sudden sting of heat finally across her palm, reddening it, Miss Worte flung wide her arms and her head backward, and her voice tore out without restraint.

"God! God! God!" And she fell to trembling so that her knees gave way under her and she crouched on the floor with her face bared to the ceiling, rocking herself back and forth, beating her fists against her flat breasts.

"God! God! God!"

"Dee Dee!—Dee Dee! my darling! my darling!"

"O God! O God! O God!"

"Dee Dee darling, it ain't nothing! A little too much strain, that's all. 'Shh-h-h! Lemme bathe them. 'Shh-h-h, my darling. Oh, my God! darling! 'Shh-h-h!"

"Lemme go! Lemme go! He told me to-day it would come like this! Only he didn't say how soon. Not how soon. I'm done for, I tell you! I'm done! Kill me, Sadie; if you love me, kill me! He told me and I wouldn't believe it! Kill me, girl, and put me out of it! I can't breathe in the dark! I can't! I can't! I can't live in the dark with my eyes open! Kill me, girl, and put me out of it—kill me! Kill me!"

"Dee Dee, my darling, ain't I right here with you? Didn't you always say, darling, when it came you—you'd face it?"

Like St. Cecilia, who could not die, she crouched, and the curve of her back rose and fell.

"O God! Oh—"

"Dee Dee darling, try not to holler out so! Maybe it ain't for—for good. Aw, darling, keep your head down here next to me! Feel how close I am, Dee Dee, right here next to you. 'Shh-h-h! O God! Dee Dee darling, you'll kill yourself going on like that! Don't pull at your hair, darling—don't! Oh, my God, don't!"

"I'm done! Kill me! Kill me! Don't make me live in the dark with my eyes open—don't! There's a good girl, Sadie. Don't! Don't! Don't!"

From the room adjoining came a rattling at the barred door between.

"Cut it, in there! This ain't no barroom. Go tell your D. T.'s to a policeman."

They crouched closer and trembling.

"'Shh-h-h! Dee Dee, darling, try to be easy and not raise the house—try!"

Miss Worte lay back exhausted against Miss Barnet's engulfing arms. Her passion ebbed suddenly and her words came scant, incoherent, and full of breath.

"No use. No use. He told me to-day he wouldn't operate. He told me. No, no, all the colors so pale—even the reds—so pale! Lavender and blue I—I just couldn't tell. I couldn't. So pale. Two yards she brought back next day, kicking at— Oh, my God! Oh, my God!"

"'Shh-h-h, darling! Don't take on so! Wait till morning and we'll get new drops from him. 'Shh-h-h! Maybe it's only strain."

"I know. I'm in the dark for good, Sadie. Oh, my God! I'm in the dark!"

Except that her face was withered, she was like Iphigenia praying for death.

"Lemme die! Lemme die!"

"'Shh-h-h—darling— That's it, rest quiet."

Suddenly Miss Worte flung up one arm about Sadie Barnet's neck, pressing her head downward until their faces touched.

"Dee Dee darling, you—you hurt."

"You won't never leave me, Sadie, like you said you would? You won't leave me alone in the dark, Sadie?"

"No, no, my darling; you know I won't, never, never."

"You'll keep me with you always, promise me that, Sadie. Promise me *that* on the curl of your mother's hair you wear in your locket. Promise me, little Sadie, you won't leave your aunt Dee Dee

alone in the dark. My poor little girl, don't leave me alone in the dark. I can't see; Sadie, I can't see no more. Promise me, Sadie, promise me, promise me!"

From Sadie Barnet's heart, weakening her like loss of blood, flowed her tears. She kissed the heart of Edith Worte where it beat like a clock beneath the high-necked nightdress; she made of her bosom a pillow of mercy and drew the head up to its warmth.

"I—I promise, Dee Dee, on her curl of hair. Sure I promise. Always will I keep you with me, darling, always, always, so help me, always."

Along the road to Newton Heights Spring and her firstlings crept out tenderly. Even close up to the rim of the oiled highway itself, an occasional colony of wood violets dared to show their heads for the brief moment before they suffocated. The threat of rain still lay on the air, but the Sunday rank and file of motors threw back tops, lowered windshields, and turned shining noses toward the greening fields.

In the red-leather tonneau, with her little face wind-blown and bared to the kiss in the air, Sadie Barnet turned to her companion and peered under the visor of his checked cap and up into his small inset eyes.

"Is—is that the house up on the hill there, Jerry?"

"Not yet. It's right around the next bend."

"Gee! My—my hands are like ice, I —I'm that nervous."

"Lemme feel."

"No."

"That's a swell way to treat a fellow who's promised to marry you."

"You — you must excuse me to-day, Jerry. Honest, without a wink of sleep last night—you must excuse me to-day. I—I'm so upset with poor Dee Dee, and on top of that so nervous about—your little girl and the house and everything. And, Dee Dee—when I think of Dee Dee."

"Don't think, Peachy; that's the way to get around that."

"I — I can't help it. You ought to seen her at the doctor's this morning, how—how the poor thing lost her nerve when he told her that there—there wasn't no hope."

"Aw, now, cut the sob stuff, Peachy! You can't help it. Nobody can, that's the trouble. Say, what kind of a little queen will they think you are if I bring you home all soppy with crying?"

"I ought not to have come, Jerry. I'm no kind of company to-day, only all of a sudden she's got so—so soft with me and she made me come while she—she tried to take a nap. Poor old Dee Dee!"

"Yeh, and poor old devil. Maybe she's just getting what's due to her."

"Jerry!"

"Sure, I believe every one of us gets what's coming to us."

"She—"

"Here we are, Tootsie. See, Peachy, that's the house I bought her and her mother, and they was kicking at it before the plaster was dry."

"Oh! Oh!"

"That's a concrete front. Neat, ain't it? That's a mosaic-floor porch, too, I built on a year after her and her mother vamoosed."

"It's a beau-tiful house, Jerry."

"You're the kind of a kid that knows how to appreciate a home when she gets it. But her with her she-devil of a mother, they no sooner got in than they began to side with each other against me—her and her old mother trying to learn me how to run my own shebang."

"Where—"

"Gad! they're living in a dirty Harlem flat now and tryin' to put it over on me that they're better off in it. Bah! if I had to double up on alimony, I wouldn't give her a smell at this house, not a smell."

"Say, but ain't it pretty, Jerry, right up over the river, and country all around, and right over there in back the street-cars for the city when you want them?"

"This is going to be your street-car, Peachy, a six-cylinder one."

She colored like a wild rose.

"Oh, Jerry, I—I keep forgetting."

"By Gad! it's a good thing I'm going to give up my city rooms and come out here to watch my p's and q's. Gosh darn her neck! I told her to quit cluttering up that side-yard turf with her gosh darn little flower-beds! Gosh darn her neck! There never was a servant worth her hide."

"Jerry, why, they're beautiful! They just look beautiful, those pansies, and is that the little girl

sitting up there on the porch steps? Is—is that Maisie?"

They drew to a stop before the box-shaped ornate house, its rough concrete front pretentiously inlaid over the doors and windows with a design of pebbles stuck like dates on a cake, and perched primly on the topmost step of the square veranda the inert figure of a small girl.

"Aw, ain't she cute?"

Miss Barnet sprang lightly to the sidewalk, and beside her Mr. Jerome Beck flecked the dust of travel from the bay of his waistcoat, shaking his trousers knees into place.

"This has got your Twenty-third Street dump beat a mile, and then some, 'ain't it, Peachy?"

"Jerry, call her here, the little girl. You tell her who — who I am. Tell her gently, Jerry, and—and how good I'm going to be to her and—Aw, ain't I the silly, though, to feel so trembly?"

The child on the step regarded their approach with unsmiling eyes, nor did she move except to draw aside her dark stuff skirts and close her knees until they touched.

"Hello there! Moping again, eh? Get up! Didn't I tell you not to let me catch you not out playing or helping Cloonan around? Say howdy to this lady. She's coming out here to live. Come here and say howdy to her."

The child shrank to the newel-post, her narrow little face overtaken with an agony of shyness.

"Cat got your tongue? Say howdy. Quit

breathing through your mouth like a fish. Say howdy, that's a good girl."

"Don't force her, Jerry. She's bashful. Ain't you, dearie? Ain't you, Maisie?"

"Moping, you mean. If it was her month in the dirty Harlem flat she'd be spry enough. She knows what I mean whan I say that, and she knows she better cut out this pouting. Quit breathing through your mouth or I'll stick a cork in it."

"Aw, Jerry, she can't help that!"

"Cat got your tongue? Where's Cloonan?"

The child's little face quivered and screwed, each feature drawing itself into position for tears. Her eyes disappeared, her nostrils distended, her mouth opened to a quivering rectangle, and she fell into silent weeping.

"Aw, Jerry—you—you scared her! Come here, darling; come here to me, Maisie; come, dearie."

But the child slid past the extended arms, down the wooden steps, and around a corner of the house, her arm held up across her eyes.

"Aw, Jerry, honest, you can be awful mean!"

"I'll get that out of her or know the reason why. They've poisoned her against me, that's about how it is in a nutshell. I'll get that pouting to be in that dirty Harlem hole with her mother and grandmother out of her or know the reason why."

"She—"

"Look, this is the front hall. Guess this 'ain't got that sty in Twenty-third Street beat some. Look! How do you like it? This way to the parlor and dining-room."

Sadie Barnet smiled through the shadows in her eyes.

"Jerry! Say, ain't this beau-tiful! A upright piano and gold chairs and— Why, Jerry! why, Jerry!"

"And look in here, the dining-room. Her and her mother shopped three weeks to get this oak set, and see this fancy cabinet full of china. Slick, ain't it?"

Her fingers curled in a soft clutch around her throat as if her breath came too fast.

"Jerry, it—it's just grand."

He marshaled her in all the pride of ownership.

"Look, butler's pantry, exposed plumbing."

"Oh! Oh!"

"Kitchen."

"Oh! Oh!"

"Here, Cloonan. I told you I was going to bring somebody out to take hold and sit on you and your bills, didn't I? This lady's coming out here to-morrow, bag and baggage. Hand over your account-book to her and I bet she does better with it. See that you fix us up in honeymoon style, too. Bag and baggage we're coming. Savvy?"

The figure beside the ill-kept stove, bowl in lap and paring potatoes with the long fleshless hands of a bird, raised a still more fleshless face.

"Howdy!"

"Cloonan's been running this shebang for two years now, Peachy, and there ain't nothing much she can't learn you about my ways. They ain't hard. Look! Porcelain-lined sink. It's got Twenty-third Street beat some, 'ain't it?"

"Yes, Jerry."

"Fix us a beefsteak supper, Cloonan, and lemme weigh up them groceries I sent out and lemme see your books afterward. Come, Peachy, here, up these stairs. This is the second floor. Pretty neat, ain't it? Her and her mother shopped three more weeks on this oak bed-set. Some little move out here from Twenty-third Street for a little rooming-house queen like you, eh? Neat little bedroom, eh, Peachy? Eh?"

His face was close to her and claret red with an expression she did not dare to face.

"And what's this next room here, Jerry? Ain't it sweet and quiet-looking! Spare room? Ain't it pretty with them little white curtains? Quit, quit, Jerry! You mustn't—you mustn't."

She broke from his embrace, confusion muddling her movements.

"Is this the—the spare room?"

"It is, now. It used to be the old woman's till I laid down on the mother-in-law game and squealed. Yeh, I used to have a little mother-in-law in our house that was some mother-in-law. Believe me, she makes that old devil of yourn look like a prize angel."

"I— This 'll be just the room for Dee Dee, Jerry, where she can feel the morning sun and hear the street-cars over there when she gets lonesome. She ought to have the sunniest room, because it's something she can feel without seeing—poor thing. This will be a swell room for poor old blind Dee Dee, won't it, Jerry? Won't it, Jerry dear?"

"Cut the comedy, Peachy. There's a neat free ward waiting for her just the other direction from the city than Newton Heights. Cut the comedy, Peachy."

"Jerry, I—I gotta have her with me. I— Now that she—she's in the dark. She couldn't stand an institution, Jerry, she—she just couldn't."

"That's what they all say, but they get over it. I know a—"

"She couldn't, Jerry. She 'ain't had much in her life, but she's always had a roof over her head that wasn't charity, and she always said, Jerry, that she couldn't never stand a—a institution. She can take any other room you say, Jerry. Maybe there's a little one up-stairs in the third story we could fix up comfy for her; but she's in the dark now, Jerry, and, my God! Jerry, she just couldn't stand an institution!"

He patted her shoulder and drew her arm through his.

"You lemme take care of that. She don't need to know nothing about it. We'll tell her we're sending her for a visit to the country for a while. After the second day she'll be as snug as a bug in a rug. They're good to 'em in those places; good as gold."

"No, no, Jerry! No, no! I gotta have her with me! She raised me from a kid and—and she couldn't stand it, Jerry! I gotta have her, I gotta! I want her!"

His mouth sagged downward suddenly and on an oblique.

"Say, somebody must have given you a few lessons in nagging, yourself. Them's the lines she used to recite to me about her she-devil of a mother, too. Gad! she used to hang on her mother's apron-strings like she was tied."

"Jerry, I—"

"Come, Peachy, don't get me sore. Come, let's talk about to-morrow. We gotta get the license first and—"

"Jerry, I— Promise me I can have her with me first. I— Just a little yes is all I want—Jerry dear—just a little yes."

A frown gathered in a triple furrow on his brow.

"Now, kiddo, you got to cut that with me, and cut it quick. If there's two things I can't stand it's nagging and pouting. Cloonan can tell you what pouting can drive me to. I'll beat it out of that girl of mine before she's through with me, and I won't stand it from no one else. Now cut it, Peachy, that's a nice girl."

He paced the carpeted space of floor between the dresser and bed, his mouth still on the oblique.

"Now cut it, Peachy, I said, and cut it quick."

She stood palpitating beside the window, her eyes flashing to his face and fastening there.

"God! I—I wanna go."

"Where?"

Her glance flashed past him out of the window and across the patch of rear lawn. A street-car bobbed across the country; she followed it with eager eyes.

"I wanna go."

He advanced, conciliatory. "Aw, now, Peachy,

a row just the day before we are married. You don't want to start out making me train you just like you was a little kid. If you was a little girl I could beat your little ways out of you, but I wanna be on the level with you and show you how nice I can be. All the things I'm going to give you, all—"

"Quit, you! I wanna go! I wanna go!"

"You can go to hell, for my part. I'm going to get a steak inside of me before we budge. Quit your fooling. See, you nearly got me sore there. Come, the car won't be back for us until six. Come, Peachy, come."

She was past him and panting down the stairs, out across the patch of rear lawn, and toward the bobbing street-car, the streamer of ribbon at her throat flying backward over her shoulder.

In the bargain basement of the Titanic Store the first day of the spring opening dragged to its close. In a meadow beside a round pond a tree dripped apple blossoms, each so frail a thing that it fluttered out and away, too light to anchor.

In careless similitude the bargain basement of the Titanic Store resuscitated from its storerooms, and from spring openings long gone by, dusty garlands of cotton May blossoms, festooning them between the great white supporting pillars of the basement and intertwining them.

Over the white-goods counter and over Sunday, as it were, a papier-mâché pergola of green lattice-work and more cotton-back May blossoms had

sprung up as if the great god Wotan had built it with a word. Cascades of summer linens, the apple green and the butter yellow, flowed from counters and improvised tables. Sadie Barnet's own mid-aisle bin had blossomed into a sacrificial sale of lawn remnants, and toward the close of the day her stock lay low, depleted.

Max Meltzer leaned out of his bower, and how muted his voice, as if it came from an inner throat that only spoke when the heart bade it.

"Little one, them remnants went like hot cakes, didn't they?"

"Hot cakes! Well, I guess. You'd have thought there was a mill-end sale on postage stamps."

"And if you don't look all tired out! If you just don't!"

The ready tears swam in her voice.

"It's — it's been awful — me away from her all day like this. But, anyways, I got news for her when I go home to-night about her five weeks' benefit money. Old Criggs was grand. He's going to send the committee to see her. Anyways, that's some good news for her."

"I just can't get her out of my mind, neither. Seems like I—I just can see her poor blind face all the time."

"M-me, too."

"They say the girls up in the ribbons been crying all day. She was no love-bird, but they say she wasn't bad underneath."

"God knows she—she wasn't."

"That's the way with some folks; they're hard

on top, but everybody knows hard-shell crabs have got sweeter meat than soft."

"Nobody knows that she was a rough diamond better than me. I got sore at her sometimes, but I —I know she was always there when I—I needed her, alrighty."

"Now, now, little girl, don't cry! You're all worn out."

"She—she was always there to stand by me in —in a pinch."

"Honest, Miss Sadie, you look just like a pretty little ghost. What you need is some spring air, girlie, some spring air for a tonic. Wouldn't I just love to take you all by your little self down the river to-night on one of them new Coney boats, where we could be — right quiet. Say, wouldn't I?"

"No—no!"

"I wanna talk to you, Miss Sadie. Can't you guess? I wanna get you all by yourself and talk to you right in your little ear."

"'Shh-h-h! You mustn't talk like that."

"That's the only way I have of trying to tell you how—how I feel, Miss Sadie—dearie."

"'Shh-h-h!"

"When I call you that it means—well, you know, dearie, you know. That's why I wanna take you to-night, dearie, all by your little self and—"

"No, no, Mr. Meltzer! I can't leave her alone like that. I promised I would never leave her alone in the dark if—if I could help it."

"Ain't I the dub? Sure you can't leave her.

We gotta stick by her now, dearie. 'Ain't we? 'Ain't we?"

A red seepage of blood surged across his face and under his hair. Beneath his little hedge of mustache his lips quivered as if at their own daring.

"We gotta stick by her, dearie."

All her senses swam, nor could she control the fluttering of her hands.

"Oh—Mr. Meltzer—Max!"

"What you and poor old Dee Dee need is some of this spring air. Gee! wouldn't I love to take you—and her down the river to-night on one of them new Coney boats? Gee! would I? Just you and—and her."

"Max—oh, Max dearie!"

"HEADS"

BY the great order of things which decreed that about the time Herod, brother to no man, died, Jesus, brother to all men, should be born; and that Rabelais, moral jester, should see light the very year that orthodox Louis XI passed on, by that same metaphysical scheme reduced to its lowliest, Essman's drop-picture machine, patent applied for, was completed the identical year that, for Rudolph Pelz, the rainy-day skirt slumped from a novelty to a commodity.

At a very low tide in the affairs of the Novelty Rainy Day Skirt Company, Canal Street, that year of our Lord, 1898, when letter-head stationery was about to be rewritten and the I-haven't-seen-you-since-last-century jocosity was about to be born, Rudolph Pelz closed his workaday by ushering out Mr. Emil Hahn, locking his front door after his full force of two women machine-stitchers, and opening a rear door upon his young manhood's estate. A modest-enough holding in the eyes of you or me as beholders; but for the past week not an evening upon opening that door but what tears rushed to his throat, which he laughed through, for shame of them.

On a bed, obviously dragged from its shadowy

corner to a place beside the single window, and propped up so that her hair, so slickly banding her head in two plaits, sprang out against the coarsely white pillows, Mrs. Rosa Sopinsky Pelz, on an evening when the air rose sultry, stale, and even garbage-laden from a cat-and-can-infested court-yard, flashed her quick smile toward that opening door, her week-old infant suckling at her breast.

"You ought to seen, Roody; she laughed! Puckered herself up into the cutest little grin when mamma left just now."

Mr. Pelz wound his way through an overcrowded huddle of furniture that was gloomily, uglily utilitarian. A sideboard spread in pressed glass; a chest of drawers piled high with rough-dry family wash; a coal-range, and the smell and sound of simmering. A garland of garlic, caught up like smilax, and another of drying red peppers. On a shelf above the sink, cluttered there with all the pitiful unprivacy of poverty, a layout, to recite which will label me with the nigritude of the realist, but which is actually the nigritude of reality—a dish of brown-and-white blobs of soap; a coffee-cup with a great jag in its lip; a bottle of dried beans; a rubber nipple floating in a saucer of water; a glass tumbler containing one inverted tooth-brush; a medicine-bottle glued down in a dark-brown pool of its own substance; a propped-up bit of mirror, jagged of edge; a piece of comb; a rhinestone breastpin; a bunion-plaster; a fork; spoon; a sprouting onion. Yet all of this somehow lit by a fall of very coarse, very white, and very freshly starched lace curtains portière-fashion from

the door, looped back in great curves from the single window, and even skirting stiffly and cleanly the bureau-front and bed-edge.

"How is my little mammela?" said Mr. Pelz, leaning over the bed to kiss Mrs. Pelz on the shining plaits, the light-tan column of throat and the little fist pressed so deeply into her bosom.

"Just ought to seen, Roody—honest, she laughed and nearly jerked off mamma's *sheidel!*" [1]

"Red head!" he said, stroking down at the warm bulge of blanket, so snugly enclosed in the crotch of mothering arm.

"It's redder than yours already, Roody."

"She's sure a grand little thing cuddled up there, ain't it so, mammela?"

She reached up to pat his blue shirt-sleeve.

"There's some herring on the table mamma brought over, and some raw meat and onions. That's some *borshtsh* on the stove Etta carried all the way over from Hester Street for your supper."

"And what for the little mammela?"

"I'm fed up, Roody. Mamma closed the store at five to run over with some of that milk-shake like Doctor Aarons said. He sent his little son Isadore over with the prescription. Like I said to mamma, she should let the Canal Street Kosher Sausage Company do double the business from five until six while she closes shop to carry her daughter a milk-shake! Like I was used to it from home!"

"When my girl gets to be a little mammela, the best shouldn't be none too good."

[1] Black wig worn by orthodox Jewish women after marriage.

She continued to stroke up at his sleeve and occasionally on up into his uneven shock of red hair.

"You miss me in the shop, Roody?"

"You should just see once how that Ruby Grabenheiner sits at your machine! She does one-half your work not one-half so good."

"I'll be back next week Monday."

He patted her quickly. "No! No! A mammela's place is with her baby."

"Roody, you make me laugh. I should sit at home now since we got a new mouth to feed? That would be a fine come-off!"

"Who do you think was just in, Rosie? Emil Hahn."

"Sol is going to make for me, Roody, one of those little packing-case cribs like he built for Etta up in the pants-factory, so when the machine works it rocks, too. Did—did the check from Solomon & Glauber come in on the last mail, Roody?"

"Now, Rosie, you mustn't worry yourself about such—"

"What you looking so funny for, Roody?"

"I was starting to tell you, Rosie — Hahn was just in and—"

"Roody, don't change the subject on me always. You looked funny. Is it something wrong with Solomon & Glau—"

"If you don't take the cake, Rosie! Now, why should I look funny? 'Funny,' she says I look. I'm hungry. I smell Etta's *borshtsh*."

She half raised herself, the pulling lips of the child drawing up the little head from the cove of arm.

"Rosie, you mustn't lift up that way!"

"Roody, I can read you like a book! Solomon & Glauber have countermanded, too."

"Now, Rosie, wouldn't that keep until—"

"They have!"

"Well, if you got to know it, Rosie, they're shipping back the consignment."

"Roody!"

"What you going to do about it? Give you my word never seen the like. It's like the rainy-day skirt had died overnight. All of a sudden from a novelty, I find myself with such a commodity that every manufacturer in the business is making them up for himself."

"You seen it first, though, Roody. Nobody can take it away from you that you seen first how the rainy-day skirt and its shortness would be such a success with the women."

"'Seen it first,' she says! Say, what good does it do me if I didn't see far enough? I pick for myself such a success that I crowd myself out of business."

"It's a dirty shame! A big firm like Solomon & Glauber should not be allowed to—"

"Say, if it wouldn't be Solomon & Glauber, it would be Funk & Hausman or any other firm. The rainy-day skirt has slipped out of my hands, Rosie, to the big fellows. We must realize that for ourselves. That's the trouble when you don't deal in a patented product. What's the little fellows like myself to do against a firm like Solomon & Glauber? Start something?"

"Three countermands in a week, and no orders coming in!"

"Say, it don't tickle my ribs no more than yours."

"Roody, maybe it's the worst thing ever happened to us you wouldn't listen to mamma and be satisfied with being chief cutter at Lipschuts'."

"Shame on you, Rosie! You want your daughter to grow up with a pants-cutter all her life for a father? You want I should die in somebody else's harness. Maybe I didn't hit it right away, but I say *yet*, if a fellow's got the eyes and the nerve to see ahead a little with his imagination—"

"'Imagination.' He talks like a story-book."

"Now—now, take Hahn, Rosie—there's a fellow's got imagination—but not enough. I know it makes you mad when I talk on his picture-machine, but you take it from me—there's a fellow with a good thing under his very nose, but he—he 'ain't quite got the eyes to see ahead."

"Say, for such a good thing like Emil Hahn's picture-machine, where his wife had to work in my own mother's sausage-store, I can't make myself excited."

"He 'ain't quite got the eyes to see, Rosie, the big idea in it. He's afraid of life, instead of making it so that life should be afraid of him. Ten dollars cheaper I can buy that machine to-day than last week. A song for it, I tell you."

"Ninety dollars to me is no cheap song, Roody."

"The people got to be amused the same as they got to be fed. A man will pay for his amusements quicker than he will pay his butcher's or his doctor's

bill. It's a cash business, Rosie. All you do with such a machine like Hahn's is get it well placed, drop your penny in the slot, and see one picture after another as big as life. I remember back in the old country, the years before we came over, when I was yet a youngster—"

"You bet Hahn never put his good money in that machine. I got it from Birdie Hahn herself. For a bad debt he took it over along with two feather beds and—"

"One after another pictures as big as life, Rosie, like real people moving. One of them, I give you my word, it's grand! A woman it shows all wrapped tight around in white, on a sofa covered over with such a spotted—what you call—leopard-skin."

"To me that has a sound, Roody, not to be proud of—"

"A living picture, with such neck and arms and—"

"That's enough, Roody! That's enough! I'm ashamed even for your daughter here!"

"Such a machine, maybe some day two or three, set up in a place like Coney Island or, for a beginning, in Pleasure Arcade, is an immense idea, Rosie. Until an invention like this, nine-tenths of the people couldn't afford the theyater. The drop-picture machine takes care of them nine-tenths."

"Theyaters are no place for the poor."

"That's where you're wrong—they need it the most. I don't want to get you worked up, Rosie, while you ain't strong, but every day that we wait we're letting a great idea slip through our fingers. If I don't buy that machine off Emil Hahn, somebody

else will see in it what I see. Then all our lives we will have something to reproach ourselves with."

Mrs. Pelz let slide her hand beneath the pillow, eyes closing and her face seeming to whiten.

"Ninety dollars! Twenty dollars less than every cent we got saved in the world. It ain't right we should gamble with it, Roody. Not now."

"Why not now, Rosie? It's all the more reason. Is it worth maybe a little gamble our Bleema should grow up like the best? I got bigger plans for her and her little mammela than such a back room all their lives. In a few years, maybe three rooms for ourselves in one of them newfangled apartment-houses up on Second Avenue with turn-on hot water—"

"That's right—you'll have her riding in a horseless carriage next!"

"I tell you, it's a big idea!"

"I wish we had ten cents for every big idea you've been struck with."

"That's just why, Rosie, I'm going to hit one right."

Mrs. Pelz withdrew then the slow hand from beneath the pillow and a small handkerchief with a small wad knotted into it.

"Nearly every—cent—in—the world, Roody, that we've got. Saved nearly penny by penny. Our Bleema—it's a sin—our—our—"

"Sin nothing!"

"Our week-old little girl—it—"

"Nothing ventured in life, Rosie, nothing squeezed out of it. Don't put it back! Look, the baby herself wants it! Papa's little Bleema! Look! She's

trying to lift herself. Ain't that remarkable, Rosie—look at that child lifting for that handkerchief!"

"Our little baby girl! If it was for ourselves alone, all right, maybe, take a chance—but for—"

Suddenly Mr. Pelz clapped his thigh. "I got it! I got it! We'll let the little Bleema decide it for us. How's that? She should decide it for us if we take a gamble on her daddy's big idea! Here—I put a five-cents piece in her little hand and see which way she drops it. The little mammela will say which way it is to be—heads or tails. How's that, Rosie—the baby should decide it for us?"

"Roody—we mustn't!"

"Heads or tails, Rosie?"

"I—I—"

"Quick!"

"H-heads!"

"Quick now, papa's baby, open up little fist!"

"Roody, not so rough! She can't hold that big nickel."

"That's just what I want—she should let it fall."

"Roody, Roody, I hope it's tails."

The coin rolled to the bed-edge, bounced off to the floor, rolled to the zinc edge.

Immediately after, on all-fours, his face screwed up for scrutiny and the back of his neck hotly ridden with crimson, Mr. Pelz leaned after.

"Roody—what?"

"Heads!"

Where Riverside Drive reaches its rococo climax of the twelve-thousand-dollar-a-year and twelve-

story-high apartment-house de luxe and duplex, and six baths divided by fourteen rooms is equal to solid-marble comfort, Elsinore Court, the neurotic Prince of Denmark and Controversy done in gilt mosaics all over the foyer, juts above the sky-line, and from the convex, rather pop-eyed windows of its top story, bulges high and wide of view over the city.

From one of these windows, looking north, Rudolph Pelz, by the holding-aside of a dead weight of pink brocade and filet lace, could gaze upon a sweep of Hudson River that flowed majestically between the great flank of the city and the brobdingnagian Palisades.

After a day when he had unerringly directed the great swinging crane of this or that gigantic transaction it had a laving effect upon him—this view of sure and fluent tide that ran so perpetually into infinitude.

Yet for Mr. Pelz to attempt to articulate into words this porcelain-thin pillar of emotions was to shatter it into brittle bits.

"Say, Rosie, ain't that a view for you? That's how it is with life—a river that rises with getting born and flows into death, and the in-between is life and—and—"

"Roody, will you please hurry for sup—dinner? Do you want Feist to arrive with you not yet dressed?"

Mr. Pelz turned then into an interior that was as pink and as silk as the inside of a bud—satin walls with side brackets softly simulating candles; a Canet bed, piled with a careful riot of sheerest and roundest of pillows; that long suit of the interior

decorator, the *chaise-longue;* the four French engravings in their gilt frames; the latest original Josephine's *secrétaire;* the shine of a white adjoining bathroom. Before a door-impaneled mirror, Mrs. Pelz, in a black-lace gown that was gracious to her rotundity.

"Just look! I'm all dressed already."

Mr. Pelz advanced to her, his clasp closing over each of her bare arms, smile and gaze lifting.

"Rosie, you've got them all beat! Guess why I wish I was your diamond necklace."

"Roody, it's nearly seven. Don't make me ashamed for Feist."

"Guess!"

"All right, then, I guess."

"So I could always be round your neck."

His hand flew immediately to the lay of gems at her throat, a small flush rising.

"Roody, you hear me—hurry! Stop it, I tell you! You pinch." But she was warmly pink now, the shake of her head setting the heavy-carat gems in her ears waggling.

Time, probably emulating destiny, had worked kindly here; had brought to Mrs. Pelz the soft, dove-like maturity of her little swell of bosom; the white, even creamy shoulders ever so slightly too plump between the blades; the still black hair polished and waved into expensive permanence. Out of years that had first veered and finally taken course under his unquestionable captaincy, Rudolph Pelz, with some of their storm and stress written in deep brackets round his mouth, the red hair just beginning

to pale and thin, and a certain roundness of back enhancing his squattiness, had come snugly and simply into harbor. Only the high cheek-bones and bony jaw-line and the rather inconveniently low voice, which, however, had the timbre of an ormolu clock in the chiming, indicating his peculiar and covert power to dominate as dynamically as ungrammatically a board of directors reckoning in millions across the mahogany.

"Shall I call in Sato to help you dress, Roody?"

"Please—no! Just to have him in the room with his yellowness and tiptoes makes me nervous like a cat."

"I got your shirt and studs laid out myself."

He pinched her cheek again. "Rosie Posy!"

"You had a hard day, Roody? You look tired."

"I don't like the battle of Waterloo in the 'Saint Elba' picture."

"Roody, that scene it took such a fortune to build into the shape of the letter A?"

"It looks like what is it. Fake! The way it reads in that *French Revolution* by that fellow Carlyle they gave me to read and the way it looks in the picture is the difference of black from white. For fifty thousand dollars more or less on a four-hundred-thousand-dollar picture I don't have a fake Waterloo."

"I should say not, Roody, when you're famous for your water scenes in all your big pictures! In 'The Lure of Silk' it's the scenes on the water they went craziest over."

"I've already got the passage engaged for next

week to shoot the company over to France. That windmill scene on Long Island looks as much like the windmill north of Fleuris, where Napoleon could see the Blucher troops from, as I look like a windmill scene. 'Sol,' I says, 'it looks just like what it is—a piece of pasteboard out of the storehouse set up on a rock. Eat those feet of film, Sol,' I says to him, 'plant 'em, drown 'em—anything you like with 'em. That kind of fake stuff won't make 'Saint Elba' the greatest picture ever released, and every picture turned out from these studios has got to be just that.' I wish you could have heard, Rosie, in the projection-room, quiet like a pin after I came out with it."

"Fifty thousand dollars, Roody?"

"Yes. 'Fifty thousand dollars,' begins Sol with me, too. 'Fifty thousand—one hundred thousand—two!' I said. 'It would make no difference. If we can't fake the kind of battle-plain that wouldn't make Napoleon turn over in his grave, we cross the ocean for the real thing.' 'Fifty thousand dollars,' Sol keeps saying—you know how he cries with his voice. 'Fifty thousand dollars your grandmother!' I hollered. 'For a few dollars more or less I should make a Rudolph Pelz picture something I'm ashamed of.' Am I right, Rosie? Am I right?"

"I should say so, Roody, for a few dollars you should not belittle yourself."

"Not if your old man knows it, by golly! and I think he does."

"Hurry now, Roody; you know how Bleema likes it you should be dressed."

"Believe me, if Feist had his choice he wouldn't be dressed, neither. Full dress for grandma and all of us to look at each other in! When there's company, it's bad enough, but for Feist and a few servants, hanged if I see it!"

"Does it hurt, Roody, to give the child a little pleasure? Anyway, she's right — people like us should get dressed up for sup—dinner. I wouldn't be surprised if she didn't bring Lester Spencer back for dinner from automobiling."

"He leaves to-night at ten with the company for Pennsylvania and the Horseshoe Bend picture. Anyways, I don't see where it comes in that for a fellow who draws his salary off of me I have to dress. I got to say it for him, though, give the devil his due, he does a good piece of work where Sol succeeds in getting him off center-stage in his scene with Wellington."

"Lester is a good actor. Madame Coutilly, to-day, when I had my manicure, just raved over him and Norma Beautiful in 'The Lure of Silk.'"

"He'll be a screen proposition some day if we can chain down some of his conceit. Only, where such friendships with him and Bleema comes in, I don't see. I don't like it."

"Say, the child likes to run around with celebrities. Why shouldn't it give her pleasure over the other girls from Miss Samuels's school to be seen out once in a while with Lester Spencer, their favorite, or Norma Beautiful? 'America's Darlings,' I see this week's *Screen Magazine* calls 'em. It's natural the child should enjoy it."

"Let her enjoy; only, where it comes in I should have to sit across from him at supper three times this week, I don't see. Out of the studio, me and Spencer don't talk the same language. To-night, him and Feist would mix like oil and water."

"Does Feist know yet, Roody, you closed the deal on the Grismer estate?"

"Sure! I says to him to-day: 'Feist, with us for next-door neighbors of your country estate, together we own nearly half of Long Island.' Am I right?"

"Like I says last night in mamma's room to Etta and Sol, 'I was used to thirty-four rooms and nineteen baths from home yet!' Poor mamma—how she laughed! Just like before her stroke."

"Nothing, Rosie, not one hundred rooms and fifty baths—nothing I can ever do for you is one-tenth that you deserve."

"And nothing, Roody, that I can do for you is one-hundredth what you deserve."

"I sometimes wonder, Rosie, if, with all we got, there isn't maybe some little happiness I've overlooked for you."

She lifted herself by his coat lapels, kissing him. "Such a question!"

"So many times it comes up in the scenarios and the picture-plots, Rosie, how money don't always bring happiness."

"It wouldn't, Roody—not a penny's worth to me without you and Bleema. But with you, Roody, no matter how happy I feel, it seems to me I can't ever feel happy enough for what we have got. Why, a woman just couldn't—why, I—I always say about

you, Roody, only yesterday to my own sister-in-law, 'Etta,' I says, 'it's hard for me to think of anything new to wish for.' Just take last week, for instance, I wished it that, right after the big check you gave for the Armenian sufferers, you should give that extra ten thousand in mamma's name to the Belgian sufferers. Done! Thursday, when I seen that gray roadster I liked so much for Bleema, this afternoon she's out riding in it. It is a wonder I got a wish for anything left in me."

"To have you talk like this, Rosie, is the highest of all my successes."

"If—if there's one real wish I got now, Roody, it is only for our Bleema. We got a young lady, honey; we got to put on our thinking-cap."

"'Young lady'—all of a sudden she decides we've got! Young baby, you better say."

"A graduate this month from Miss Samuels's Central Park School he calls a baby!"

"Let me see—how old is—"

"He don't know his own child's age! Well, how many years back is it since we were in rainy-day skirts?"

"My God! Ten—fourteen—eighteen! Eighteen years! Our little Bleema! It seems yesterday, Rosie, I was learning her to walk along Grand Street."

"You haven't noticed, Roody, David Feist?"

"'Noticed'?"

"Say, you may be a smart man, Rudolph Pelz—everybody tells me you are—but they should know once on the Picture Rialto how dumb as a father

you are. 'Noticed?' he asks. All right then—if you need a brick house—noticed that David Feist hates your daughter and 'ain't got eyes for her and don't try every excuse to get invited here for sup—dinner."

"You mean, Rosie—"

"Of course I mean! It's pitiful how he follows her everywhere with his eyes. In the box last night at the opera you was too asleep to see it, but all evening Etta was nudging me how he nearly ate up our Bleema just with looks."

"You women with your nonsense!"

"I guess, Rudolph, it would be a bad thing. Our daughter and a young man smart enough to make himself from a celluloid collar-cutter to a millionaire five times over on a little thing like inventing a newfangled film-substance should tie up with the only child of Rudolph Pelz, the picture king."

"I give you my word, Rosie, such talk makes me sick."

"You'd hate it, wouldn't you? A prince like David Feist."

"People don't talk such things till they happen. If our daughter could have the King of England and didn't want him, I'd say she should not marry the King of England. I want my girl home by me yet, anyway, for many a long day. She should be playing with her dolls instead of her mother and aunt Etta filling her up with ideas. Don't think I'm so stuck, neither, on how she runs around with my film stars."

"Honest, Roody, the way you're so strict with that child it's a shame! The girl has got to have her pleasure."

"Well, if she's got to have her pleasure, she should have it with young men like Feist and not with—"

"There! Didn't I tell you so? Didn't I?"

"Say, I don't deny if I got some day to have a son-in-law, my first choice for him would be Feist."

"Roody, the two estates together in one!"

"I'm surprised at you, Rosie—honest, I'm surprised. Such talk!"

Mrs. Pelz took a pinch of his each cheek, tiptoeing to kiss him squarely on the lips.

"Go get dressed," she said, "and I'll wait for you."

"Rosie Posy," he said, clucking into his cheek with his tongue and moving away through the pink-shaded twilight.

At the door to the whitely glittering bathroom she called to him again, softly; he turning.

"What 'll you bet, Roody, that I get my biggest wish as soon as I got the gray roadster and the Belgian check?"

"Women's nonsense!" said Mr. Pelz, his voice suddenly lost in the violent plunge of water into porcelain.

In a drawing-room faithful to Dunlap Brothers' exorbitant interpretation of the Italian Renaissance, a veritable forest of wrought-iron candle-trees burned dimly into a scene of Pinturicchio table, tapestry-surmounted wedding-chest, brave and hideous with *pastiglia* work, the inevitable camp-chair of

Savonarola, an Umbrian-walnut chair with lyre-shaped front, bust of Dante Alighieri in Florentine cap and ear-muffs, a Sienese mirror of the soul, sixteenth-century suit of cap-à-pie armor on gold-and-black plinth, Venetian credence with wrought-iron locks. The voiceless and invoiced immobility of the museum here, as if only the red-plush railing, the cords from across chairs, and the "Do Not Sit" warnings to the footsore had been removed.

Against a chair cruel to the back with a carved coat of arms of the Lombardi family Mr. David Feist leaned lightly and wisely. If his correct-enough patent pumps ever so slightly escaped the floor, his span of shoulders left hardly an inch to be desired. There was a peninsula of rather too closely shaved but thick black hair jutted well down Mr. Feist's brow, forming what might have been bald but were merely hairless inlets on either side. Behind *pince-nez* his eyes sparkled in points not unlike the lenses themselves. Honed to a swift, aquiline boniness of profile which cut into the shadows, there was something swiftly vigorous about even his repose.

Incongruous enough on the Pinturicchio table, and as if she had dared to walk where mere moderns feared to tread, a polychrome framed picture of Miss Bleema Pelz, tulle-clouded, piquant profile flung charmingly to the northwest, and one bare shoulder prettily defiled with a long screw-curl, lit, as it were, into the careful gloom.

Deliberately in range of that photograph, and so beatific of gaze that it was as if his sense were soaked

in its loveliness, Mr. Feist smiled, and, smiling, reddened. Enter then Mrs. Pelz, hitting softly into white taffetas beneath the black lace; Mr. Pelz, wide, white and boiled of shirt-front.

"Good evening, Mr. Feist! It's a shame the way we kept you waiting."

"Not at all, Mrs. Pelz—a pleasure. Hello! how's my friend, the picture king?"

"Rotten," said Mr. Pelz, amiably, shaking hands with a great riding-up of cuff, and seating himself astride a Florentine bench and the leather-embossed arms of the Strozzi family.

"Roody, what a way to sit!"

"'What a way to sit,' she tells me. I'd like to see a fellow sit any way in this room without making a monkey of himself. Am I right, Feist? The Eyetalians maybe didn't know no better, but I should have to suffer, too, when for four-seventy-nine I can buy myself at Tracy's the finest kind of a rocking-chair that fits me."

"Roody!"

"Say, Feist agrees with me; only, he don't know you well enough yet to let on. I notice that with all his Louis-this and Louis-that rooms in his own house, up in his own room it is a good old Uncle Sam's cot and a patent rocker."

"You've got a gorgeous room here just the same, Pelz."

"Gorgeous for a funeral."

"Every collector in the country knows that table. I had my eye on it for my music-room once myself when it was shown at Dunlap's."

"Dunlap's are a grand firm of decorators, Mr. Feist. I'm having them do Grismer, too."

"Well, Feist, how does it feel to have us for neighbors?"

"Immense, Pelz!"

"Like I said to my husband, between us the way the estates adjoin, we got a monopoly on Long Island—ain't it so?"

"And believe me, Mrs. Pelz, you'll never regret the buy. The finest pleasure my money brought me yet is that view of my little bedroom I took you up to, Pelz."

"Wonderful!"

"I've got an outlook there, Mrs. Pelz, is a paradise to see. You can have all my forty-two rooms and two garages if you'll leave me my little top room with its miles of beautiful greenness, and —and so—so much beauty that—that it gets you by the throat. I—don't express it the way I see it, but—"

"I should say so, Mr. Feist! Out of every one of our thirty-four rooms and eighteen baths you can see a regular oil-painting."

Mr. Pelz leaned over, tongue in cheek and, at the screwing noise again, poking Mr. Feist in the region of the fifth rib.

"She said to me up-stairs just now, Feist, 'Like we was used to it from home?' Eh? C-c-c-cluck! Eighteen baths a day! I know the time when one every Saturday night was stuck up."

"Roody, honest, you're awful!"

"Say, me and Feist speak the same language.

We ain't entertaining a lot of motion-picture stars to-night."

"I want Mr. Feist to come over some night to sup —dinner when we have a few of them over. We're great friends, Mr. Feist, with Norma Beautiful and Allan Hunt and Lester Spencer and all that crowd. We entertain them a good deal. My daughter is quite chums with them all. Elsie Love sleeps here some nights. Honest, Mr. Feist, you never saw a more unassuming girl for her salary."

"Yes, especially is she unassuming when she spoils ninety feet of film yesterday in a row with Spencer over who should have one-half inch nearer to the center of the picture."

"My husband, Mr. Feist, has got no patience with temperament."

"Honey, a little supper wouldn't hurt."

"I'll send and see if Bleema is ready yet. She's been out, taking Lester Spencer in her new runabout her papa bought her. I wish you could see, Mr. Feist, the way the traffic policemen smile after that girl the way she handles a car. If I do say it, she's a picture."

"If you ask me, Mrs. Pelz, the finest of the objects in this room of fine things, it won't take me long to tell you," said Mr. Feist, leaning forward to lift for closer gaze the framed photograph.

"Now you're shouting, Feist!"

"That picture don't half do her justice. If I do say it, Mr. Feist — if that child had to make her living, she'd be a fortune in pictures. 'No, mamma,' she always says; 'God forbid if I have to make my

living some day, I want to be a famous writer.' I want you to read sometime, Mr. Feist, some of that girl's poetry. I cry like a baby over the sad ones. And stories! There's one about a poor little girl who could look out of her window into the house of a rich girl and—"

"Feist, her mother just hates that child!"

"Say, old man, I don't see any medals on you for hating her."

"He's worse than I am, Mr. Feist; only, he hides it behind making fun of me. I always say if Bleema Pelz wanted the moon, her father would see to it that his property-man got the real one for her."

"You—you've got a beautiful, sweet little girl there, Pelz. I don't blame you."

"Feist, if I didn't know it, I'd be an ungrateful dog."

"Her papa can't realize, Mr. Feist, we haven't got a baby any more."

"I—realize it, Mrs. Pelz."

"You—you see, Roody?"

"I—I—guess I'm the old-fashioned kind of a fellow, Pelz, when it comes to girls. I—I guess I do it the way they used to do it—the parents first—but—but—now that we—we're on the subject—I—I like your daughter, Pelz—my God! Pelz, but—but I like your little daughter!"

An Augsburg clock ticked into a suddenly shaped silence, Mr. Pelz rising, Mr. Feist already risen.

"I haven't got much besides a clean record and all that love or money can buy her, Pelz, but—well—you know me for what I am, and—"

"Indeed we do, Mr. Feist! I always say to my husband my favorite of all the young men who come here is—"

"You know what my standing—well, with men and in business is, Pelz, and as far as taking care of her goes, I can make her from a little princess into a little queen—"

"The young man that is lucky enough to get Bleema, Mr. Feist—"

"Not that the money part is everything, but if what I am suits you and Mrs. Pelz, I want to enter the ring for her. I might as well come out with it. I wouldn't for anything on earth have her know that I've spoken to you—yet—not till after I've spoken with her—but—well, there's my cards on the table, Pelz."

Mr. Pelz held out a slow and rigid arm, one hand gripping, the other cupping Mr. Feist at the elbow.

"It's the finest compliment I could pay to any man on God's earth to say it, Feist, but if it's got to be that my little baby girl has grown up to an age where she—"

"She's already a year older than me when I married you, Roody."

"If it's got to be, then there's one man on earth I can give her up to with happiness. That man is you, Feist."

Into this atmosphere so surcharged that it had almost the singing quality of a current through it entered Miss Bleema Pelz, on slim silver heels that twinkled, the same diaphanous tulle of the photograph enveloping her like summer, her hair richer,

but blending with the peach-bloom of her frock, the odor of youth her perfume.

"Bleema darling, you're just in time!"

"Hello, moms!"—in the little lifted voice trained to modulation, and kissing Mrs. Pelz in light consideration of powdered areas. "Hello, dads!"—tiptoeing and pursing her mouth into a bud. "Good evening, Mr. Feist."

"Looks like I'm the left-over in this party," said Mr. Feist, slow to release her hand and wanting not to redden.

"Naughty-naughty!" said Miss Pelz, with a flash of eyes to their corners, a flouncing of tulle, and then landing ever so lightly on her father's knee and at the immediate business of jerking open his tie. "Bad, bad dad! Didn't let Sato dress him to-night."

"You little red head, you!"

"Stop it! Hold up your chin."

"Honey, we're all starvationed."

"Lester 'll be here any minute now."

"Lester Spencer coming for dinner, Bleema?"

"Surely. I dropped him just now at the Lions' Club to change his clothes. Now, don't get excited, dads; he's leaving right after dinner to catch his train for Horseshoe Bend."

"I must tell Williams to lay another—"

"I've already told him, mamma. Here he is now! Come on in, Lester; you're holding up the family. You've never met Mr. Feist, have you, the film king? You two ought to get acquainted—one makes the films and the other makes them famous."

There was a round of greetings, Mr. Spencer pass-

ing a hand that had emerged white and slim through the ordeal of thousands of feet of heroics.

"How do you do, Mrs. Pelz? Boss! Mr. Feist, glad to know you!"

What hundreds of thousands of men, seeming to despise, had secretly, in the organ-reverberating darkness of the motion-picture theater, yearned over Mr. Lester Spencer's chest expansion, hair pomade, and bulgeless front and shirt-front! When Lester Spencer, in a very slow fade-out, drew the exceedingly large-of-eye and heaving-of-bosom one unto his own immaculate bosom, whole rows of ladies, with the slightly open-mouthed, adenoidal expression of vicarious romance, sat forward in their chairs. Men appraised silently the pliant lay of shirt, the uncrawling coat-back, and the absence of that fatal divorce of trousers and waistcoat.

"I was telling my husband, Lester, my manicurist just raved to-day about you and Norma Beautiful in 'The Lure of Silk.'"

"Isn't that just the sweetest picture, moms?"

"It certainly is! Mr. Pelz took me down to the projection-room to see its first showing, and I give you my word I said to him and Sol—didn't I, Roody? —'That picture is a fortune.' And never in my life did I fail to pick a winner—did I, Roody? I got a knack for it. Mr. Feist, have you seen 'The Lure of Silk'?"

"Sorry to say I have not."

"If you think that is a riot, Mrs. Pelz, you wait until you see the way they're going to eat me up in the court scene in 'Saint Elba.' I had the whole

studio crying down there to-day — didn't I, Mr. Pelz? Crying like babies over the scene where I stand like this—so—overlooking—"

"Say, Rosie, that's twice already Williams announced dinner is served."

"Overlooking the—"

"I hear Friedman & Kaplan made an assignment, Feist."

"Come, Lester; you take me in to dinner. Rudolph, you go and get mamma. Bleema, you and Mr. Feist be escorts."

In a dining-room so unswervingly Jacobean that its high-back chairs formed an actual enclosure about the glittering, not to say noble, oval of table, the dinner-hour moved through the stately procession of its courses. At its head, Mrs. Miriam Sopinsky, dim with years and the kind of weariness of the flesh that Rembrandt knew so well, her face even yellower beneath the black wig with the bold row of machine-stitching down its center, the hands veiny and often uncertain among the dishes.

"Roody, cut up mamma's chicken for her. She trembles so."

"Moms, let Williams."

"No; she likes it when your father does it."

Mr. Pelz leaned over, transferring his own knife and fork. In Yiddish:

"Grandmother, I hear you've been flirting with Doctor Isadore Aarons. Now, don't you let me hear any more such nonsense. The young girls in this house got to walk the straight line."

The old face broke still more furiously into wrinkle, the hand reaching out to top his.

"Don't tease her, Roody; she likes to be let alone in public."

Mr. Feist: The old lady certainly holds her own, don't she? Honest, I'd give anything if I knew how to talk to her a little.

"No, Mr. Feist, mamma's breaking. Every day since her stroke I can see it more. It nearly kills me, too. It's pretty lonesome for her, up here away from all her old friends. Outside of my husband and Bleema, not a soul in the house talks her language except Sol and Etta when they come over."

"She's my nice darling grandma," said Miss Pelz, suddenly pirouetting up from her chair around the table, kissing the old lips lightly and then back again, all in a butterfly jiffy.

Mrs. Pelz (*sotto to Mr. Feist*): Ain't she the sweetest thing with her grandmother?

"Umh!" said Mr. Spencer, draining his wine-glass to the depth of its stem. "Mr. Pelz, believe me if the Atlantic Ocean was made out of this stuff, you wouldn't have to engage passage for me; I'd swim across."

"You better learn how first," said Mr. Pelz. "You've cost me a fortune already in dummies for the water scenes."

"It's a riot, Mr. Pelz, the way they go mad over me in that Pelham Bay scene in 'The Marines Are Coming.' I dropped into the Buckingham to see it last night, and before I knew it the house had it that

I was present and was going wild over me. They had to throw the spotlight on the box."

"I love that scene, too, Lester! Honest, I just squeeze up with excitement where you stand there at the edge of the deck and take the plunge into the water to rescue Norma Beautiful."

"You mean a super for five a day takes the plunge."

"Tell you another scene where I simply raise the roof off the house in—"

MR. PELZ: Williams, pass Mr. Feist some more of them little cabbages.

"Brussels sprouts, dad."

MRS. PELZ: I guess you miss Norma Beautiful not playing with you in "Saint Elba," don't you, Lester? You and her are so used to playing with each other.

"I was the one first suggested she wouldn't be the type to play Josephine, Mrs. Pelz. Too thin. I've got to be contrasted right or it kills me—"

"Williams, a little more of that chicken stuffing. It's almost good enough to remind me how you and grandma used to make it, Rosie."

"Speaking of 'Saint Elba,' Mr. Pelz, somebody must speak to Mabel Lovely about the way she keeps hogging center-stage in that scene with me on—"

"There's no center-stage left to hog with you in the picture, Spencer."

"She crowds me to profile. They want me full-face. If you'd put in a word to Sol to direct it that way! Other night, at the Buckingham, it was a riot every time I turned full-face. Just because

a fellow happens to have a good profile is no reason why—"

"Well, Feist, how does the war look to-day?"

"Ugly, Pelz, ugly. Every hour this country lets pass with Belgium unavenged she is going to pay up for later."

"It's not our fight, Mr. Feist."

"Maybe it's not our fight, Mr. Spencer, but if ever there was a cause that is all humanity's fight, it is those bleeding and murdered women and children of Belgium. You're sailing over there yourself next week, Mr. Spencer, and I hope to God you will see for yourself how much of our fight it is."

"Ain't things just simply terrible? Honest, I said to Roody, when I picked up the paper this morning, it gives me the blues before I open it."

"Nobody can tell me that this country is going to sit back much longer and see autocracy grind its heel into the face of the world."

"You're right, Feist! I think if there is one thing worse than being too proud to fight, it is not being proud enough to fight."

"Lester Spencer, if you don't stop making eyes!"

"Mr. Pelz, every time I drink to your daughter only with my eyes she slaps me on the wrist. You put in a good word for me."

"Little more of that ice-cream, Feist?"

"Thanks, Pelz; no."

"You, Lester?"

"Don't care if I do, Miss Bleema Butterfly."

Mr. Pelz flashed out a watch. "Don't want to

hurry you, Spencer, but if you have to catch that ten-o'clock train, by the time you get back and change clothes—"

"You're right, Mr. Pelz; I'd better be getting on."

Miss Pelz danced to her feet. "Mamma and papa will excuse us, Lester, if we leave before coffee. Come; I'll shoot you to the club."

"Why, Bleema! George will bring the limousine around and—"

"I promised! Didn't I promise you, Lester, that if you came up to dinner I'd drive you back to the club myself?"

"She sure did, Mrs. Pelz."

"Bleema, you stay right here and finish your supper. There's two chauffeurs on the place to drive Spencer around to his club."

"But, dad, I promised."

"Why, Bleema, ain't you ashamed? Mr. Feist here for dinner and you to run off like that. Shame on you!"

"Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Pelz. I'll stay around and be entertained by you and Mr.—"

"I'll be back in twenty minutes, moms. Surely you'll excuse me that long! I want to drive him down in my new runabout. I promised. Please, moms! Dad?"

"Ask your papa, Bleema; I—I don't know—"

"Dad?"

"You heard what I said, Bleema. No!"

A quick film of tears formed over Miss Pelz's eyes, her lips quivering. "Oh, well—if—if you're going to be that mean—oh, you make me so mad— Come

on, Lester—I—I guess I can take you as far as the front door without the whole world jumping on me. Oh—oh—you make me so mad!" And pranced out on slim feet of high dudgeon.

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Pelz, stirring into her coffee. "She's so high strung."

"She's got to quit wasting her time on that conceited jackass," said Mr. Pelz, swallowing off his demi-tasse at a gulp. "Won't have it!"

"It makes her papa mad the way the boys just kill themselves over that girl," said Mrs. Pelz, arch of glance toward Mr. Feist, who was stirring also, his eyes lowered.

"Me, too," he said, softly.

"Jealous!" flashed Mrs. Pelz.

After an interval, and only upon despatching a servant, Miss Pelz returned, the tears frank streaks now down her cheeks.

"Sit down, baby, and drink your coffee."

"Don't want any."

"Williams, bring Miss Bleema some hot coffee."

"I'm finished, mother—please!"

"I was telling Mr. Feist a while ago, Bleema, about your ambition to be a writer, not for money, but just for the pleasure in it. What is it you call such writing in your French, honey? Dilytanty?"

"Please, mamma, Mr. Feist isn't interested."

"Indeed I am, Miss Bleema! More interested than in anything I know of."

"She's mad at her papa, Feist, and when my little girl gets mad at her papa there's nothing for him to do but apologize with a big kiss."

Suddenly Miss Pelz burst into tears, a hot cascade of them that flowed down over her prettiness.

"Why, Bleema!"

"Now, now, papa's girl—"

The grandmother made a quick gesture of uplifted hands, leaning over toward her, and Miss Pelz hiding her face against that haven of shrunken old bosom.

"Oh, grandma, make 'em let me alone!"

"Why, Bleema darling, I'm surprised! Ain't you ashamed to act this way in front of Mr. Feist? What 'll he think?"

"Please, Mrs. Pelz, don't mind me; she's a little upset—that's all."

"You—you made me look like—like thirty cents before Lester Spencer—that—that's what you did."

"Why, Bleema, do you think that if papa thought that Lester Spencer was worth bothering that pretty red head of yours about that he would—"

"There you go again! Always picking on Lester. If you want to know it, next to Norma Beautiful and Allan Hunt he's the biggest money-maker your old corporation has got."

"What's that got to do with you?"

"And he'll be passing them all in a year or two, you see if he don't—if—if—if only you'd stop picking on him and letting Uncle Sol crowd him out of the pictures and everybody in the company take advantage of him—he—he's grand—he—"

"He's a grand conceited fool. If not for the silly matinée women in the world he couldn't make salt."

"That shows all you know about him, papa! He's got big ideals, Lester has. He got plans up his sleeve for making over the moving-picture business from the silly films they show nowadays to—"

"Yes—to something where no one gets a look-in except Lester Spencer. They're looking for his kind to run the picture business!"

"Roody—Bleema—please! Just look at poor grandma! Mr. Feist, I must apologize."

"He's a nix, an empty-headed—"

"He is—is he? Well, then—well, then—since you force me to it—right here in front of Mr. Feist—Lester Spencer and I got engaged to-day! He's the only man in my life. We're going to be married right off, in time for me to sail for France with the company. He's going to talk to you when he gets back from Horseshoe Bend. We're engaged! That's how much I think of Lester Spencer. That's how much I know he's the finest man in the world. Now then! Now then!"

There was a note in Miss Pelz's voice that, in the ensuing silence, seemed actually to ring against the frail crystal. She was on her feet, head up, tears drying.

"Blee-Bleema!"

"Moms darling, aren't you happy? Isn't it wonderful—moms?"

"Roody! For God's sake, Bleema, you're choking your father to death! Roody, for God's sake, don't get so red! Williams—some water—quick! Roody!"

"I'm all right. All right, I tell you. She got me excited. Sit down, Bleema—sit down, I said."

"Pelz, if you don't mind, I think maybe I'd better be going."

"You stay right here, Feist. I want you to hear every word that I'm going to say. If my daughter has no shame, I haven't, either. Williams, call Mrs. Sopinsky's maid, and see that she gets to her room comfortable. Sit down, Bleema!"

"My God!—I can't believe my ears—Bleema and such a *goy* play-actor—"

"Please, Rosie!"

"A *goy* that—"

"Rosie, I said, 'Please!' Bleema, did you hear me? Sit down!"

Miss Pelz sat then, gingerly on the chair-edge, her young lips straight. "Well?"

Her father crunched into his stiff damask napkin, holding a fistful of it tense against bringing it down in a china-shivering bang. Then, with carefully spaced words, "If I didn't think, Bleema, that you are crazy for the moment, infatuated with—"

"I'm not infatuated!"

"Bleema, Bleema, don't talk to your father so ugly!"

"Well, I guess I know my own mind. I guess I know when I'm in love with the finest, darlingest fellow that ever—"

"You hush that, Bleema! Hush that, while I can hold myself in. That I should live to hear my child make herself common over a loafer—"

"Papa, if you call him another name, I—I—"

"You'll sit right here and hear me out. If you think you're going to let this loafer ruin your own

life and the lives of your parents and poor grandmother—"

"Papa, papa, you don't know him! The company are all down on him because they're jealous. Lester Spencer comes from one of the finest old Southern families—"

"Roody, Roody, a *goy* play-actor—"

"'A *goy* play-actor'! I notice, mamma, you are the one always likes to brag when the girls and fellows like Norma Beautiful and Allan Hunt and Lester and—and all come up to the house. It's the biggest feather in your cap the way on account of papa the big names got to come running when you invite them."

"Your mother's little nonsenses have got nothing to do with it."

"She reproaches me with having brought about this *goy* mix-up! Me that has planned each hour of that girl's life like each one was a flower in a garden. A young man, a grand young man like Mr. Feist, crazy in lo—"

"Mrs. Pelz, for God's sake! Mrs. Pelz, please!"

"Rosie, we'll leave Feist out of this."

"Lester Spencer, papa, is one of the finest characters, if only you—"

"I ask you again, Bleema, to cut out such talk while I got the strength left to hold in. It's a nail in my coffin I should live to talk such talk to my little daughter, but it's got to where I've got to say it. Lester Spencer and the fine character you talk about—it's free gossip in all the studios—is one of the biggest low-lifes in the picture-world. He

has a reputation with the women that I'm ashamed to mention even before your mother, much less her daughter—"

"Oh, I know what you mean! Oh, you're like all the rest—down on him. You mean that silly talk about him and Norma Beautiful—"

"Oh my God, Roody, listen to her!"

"I can clear that up in a minute. He never cared a thing for her. It was just their always playing in the same pictures, and that silly matinée public, first thing he knew, got to linking their names together."

"Bleema—for God's sake—baby—what do you know about such?"

"Bleema, you're killing your mother! Your mother that used to rock you in your cradle while she stitched on the machine to buy you more comforts—a mother that—"

"Oh, if you're going to begin that!"

"Your poor old grandmother—don't she mean nothing? You saw how she looked just now when they took her out, even before she knows what it's all about—"

"I hope she never has a worse trouble than for me to marry the best—"

Then Mr. Pelz came down with crashing fist that shattered an opalescent wine-glass and sent a great stain sprawling over the cloth.

"By God, I'll kill him first! The dirty hou—"

"Pelz, for God's sake, control yourself!"

"I'll kill him, I tell you, Feist!"

"Roody!"

"You can't scare me that way, dad. I'm no baby to be hollered at like that. I love Lester Spencer, and I'm going to marry him!"

"I'll kill him; I'll—"

"Roody, Roody, for God's sake! 'Sh-h-h, the servants! Williams, close quick all the doors. Roody, for my sake, if not your child's! Mr. Feist, please—please make him, Mr. Feist!"

"Pelz, for God's sake, man, get yourself together! Excitement won't get you anywheres. Calm down. Be human."

Then Mr. Pelz sat down again, but trembling and swallowing back with difficulty. "She got me wild, Feist. You must excuse me. She got me wild —my little girl—my little flower—"

"Papa—dad darling! Don't you think it kills me, too, to see you like this? My own darling papa that's so terribly good. My own darling sweet mamma. Can't you see, darlings, a girl can't help it when—when—life just takes hold of her? I swear to you—I promise you that, when you come to know Lester as I know him you'll think him as fine and—and gorgeous as I do. Mamma, do you think your little Bleema would marry a man who doesn't just love you, and dad, too? It isn't like Lester is a nobody—a high-salaried fellow like him with a future. Why, the best will be none too good! He loves you both—told me so to-day. The one aim in his life is to do big things, to make you both proud, to make his name the biggest—"

"Feist—Feist—can't you talk to her? Tell her it's madness—tell her she's ruining herself."

"Why, Miss Bleema, there's nothing much a—a stranger like me can say at a time like this. It's only unfortunate that I happened to be here. If I were you, though, I think I'd take a little time to think this over. Sometimes a young girl—"

"I have thought it over, Mr. Feist. For weeks and weeks I've thought of nothing else. That's how sure I am—so terribly sure."

"I won't have it, I tell you! I'll wring his—"

"'Sh-h-h, Pelz. If you'll take my advice, you'll handle this thing without threats. Why not, Miss Bleema, even if you do feel so sure, give yourself a little more time to—"

"No! No! No!"

"Just a minute now. If you feel this way so strongly to-night, isn't it just possible that to-morrow, when you wake up, you may see things differently?"

"I tell you I'm going to France with him—on our honeymoon. It's all fixed if—moms—dad—won't you please—darlings—can't you see—my happiness—"

"O God, Roody, were ever parents in such a fix?"

"Listen to me, Miss Bleema, now: I'm an old friend of the family, and you don't need to take exception to what I'm going to suggest. If your heart is so set on this thing, all right then, make up your mind it's an engagement and—"

"By God, Feist, no!"

"Wait, Pelz, I tell you you're making a mistake with your state of excitement."

"Let Mr. Feist talk, Roody."

"Make up your mind as I was saying, Miss Bleema, that this engagement exists between you and—and this young man. Then, instead of doing the hasty thing and marrying next week, you remain here a happy, engaged girl until the company returns in three weeks, and meanwhile you will have time to know your own mind and—"

"No! No! No! I do know it! It's all fixed we're—"

"That's a fine idea of Mr. Feist's, Bleema darling. For mamma's sake, baby. For grandma's. If it's got to be an engagement, hold it until after he gets back. Don't go rushing in. Take time to think a little. France is no place for a honeymoon now—submarines and all."

"Oh, I know! You hope he'll get sunk with a submarine."

"Shame, Miss Bleema; shame!"

"All mamma means, darling, is take a little time and get a—a trousseau like a girl like you has to have. If your heart is so set on it, can't you do that much to please mamma? That much?"

"There's a trick. You want me to wait and then—"

"Miss Bleema, is my promise to you enough that there's no trick? On my respect for your parents and grandmother, there's no trick. If it is only to please them, wait those few weeks and do it more dignified. If it's got to be, then it's got to be. Am I right, Pelz?"

Mr. Pelz turned away, nodding his head, but with lips too wry to speak.

"O my God, yes! Mr. Feist, you're right. Bleema, promise us! Promise!"

"Just a matter of a few weeks more or less, Miss Bleema. Just so your parents are satisfied you know your own mind."

"I do!"

"Then, I say, if you still feel as you do, not even they have the right to interfere."

"Promise us, Bleema; promise us that!"

"I—I'll be engaged on your word of honor—without any fussing about it?"

"An engaged girl, Miss Bleema, like any other engaged girl."

"But dad—look at him—he won't—p-promise," trembling into tears.

"Of course he will—won't you, Pelz? And you know the reputation your father has for a man of his word."

"Will—will he promise?"

"You do; don't you, Pelz?"

Again the nod from the bitter inverted features.

"Now, Miss Bleema?"

"Well then, I—I—p-promise."

On a May-day morning that was a kiss to the cheek and even ingratiated itself into the bale-smelling, truck-rumbling pier-shed, Mr. Lester Spencer, caparisoned for high seas by Fifth Avenue's highest haberdasher, stood off in a little cove of bags and baggage, yachting-cap well down over his eyes, the nattiest thing in nautical ulsters buttoned to the chin. Beside him, Miss Norma Beautiful,

her small-featured pink-and-whiteness even smaller and pinker from the depths of a great cart-wheel of rose-colored hat, completely swathed in rose-colored veiling.

"For a snap of my finger I'd spill the beans—that's how stuck on this situation I am!"

Mr. Spencer plunged emphatic arms into large patch-pockets, his chin projecting beyond the muffle of collar.

"Just you try it and see where it lands you!"

Then Miss Beautiful from the rosy depths of hat began to quiver of voice, jerky little sobs catching her up.

"I can't stand it! I b-bit off a b-bigger piece than I can swallow."

"Now, Darling Beautiful, I ask you would your own Lester do anything that wasn't just going to be the making of his girl as well as himself? Is it anything, Angel Beautiful, he is asking you to do except wait until—"

"I can't bear it, I tell you! A little red-haired kike like her! How do I know what I'm letting myself in for? There's only one ground for divorce in this state. What guarantee have I you'll get free on it?"

"My guarantee, Pussy. You're letting yourself in for a pink limousine to match that pink sweetness of yours and a jumping-rope of pearls to match those sweet teeth of yours and—"

"I want black pearls, Lester, like Lucille Du Pont's."

"Black, then. Why, Angel Beautiful, you just

know that there's not a hair on any head in the world, much less a red one, I'd change for one of my girl's golden ones. You think I'd ever have known the little Reddie was on earth if she hadn't just flung herself at my head! She could have been six Rudolph Pelz's daughters, and I wouldn't have had eyes for her."

"But, Lester—she—she's right cute. What guarantee have I got?"

"Cross my heart and swear to die, Angel! Haven't I already sworn it to you a thousand thousand times? You wouldn't want me to close my eyes to the chance of a lifetime—you know you wouldn't, Beautiful, when it's your chance as much as mine. Both ours!"

"I—if only it was—over, Lester—all—over!"

"What's three weeks, Angel Beautiful? The very day I'm back I'll pull the trick with the little red head, and then I'm for letting things happen quick."

"And me, what 'll I—"

"I'm going to move you into the solid-goldest hotel suite in this here town, Pussy. I'm going to form the Norma Beautiful Film Corporation in my own girl's name, the first pop out of the box. Why, there's just nowhere Rudolph Pelz's son-in-law can't get his girl in the little while I'm going to stick."

"How do I know? How do I know they won't find a way to hold you?"

"Why, Darling Beautiful, when they're through with me, they'll pay me off in my weight in gold. Haven't you said things often enough about your boy's temper when he lets it fly? You think they're

going to let me cut up nonsense with that little Reddie of theirs? Why, that old man would pay with his right eye to protect her!"

"O God, it's rotten—a nice fellow like Pelz—a—"

"It's done every day, Gorgeous Beautiful. Anyway, there's no way to really hurt the rich. Look at Warren Norton—the Talcott family paid Warren two hundred cool thousand to give her back quietly. It's done every day, Gorgeousness. Many a fellow like me has gotten himself roped into a thing he wanted to get out of quietly. That little girl lassoed me. I should have eyes for a little Reddie like her with the Deep-Sea Pearl of the world my very own. I'm going to marry you, too, Gorgeousness. I'm going to see you right through, this time. Jump right out of the frying-pan into the hottest, sweetest fire!"

"I tell you I can't stand it! Promising to marry me with another one to see through before you get to me. It—it's terrible! I—"

"There you go again! The Norma Beautiful Film Corporation doesn't tickle my pink rose on the ear-drums! She doesn't want it! Wouldn't have it!"

"I do, Lester; I do—only—only—I—the little Reddie—it's not right. She's a sweet little thing. I'm afraid, Lester—I think I must be going crazy! I wish to God I could hate you the way you ought to be hated. I tell you I can't stand it. You sailing off like this. The coming back—her—I'll kill myself during the ceremony. I—"

"You create a scene down here and you'll be sorry!"

"Lester—please!"

"They'll be here any minute now. They're late as it is. Look—everybody's on board already! One more blast, and I'll have to go, too. You just kick up nasty at the last minute and watch me!"

"I won't, Lester; I won't! I swear to God! Only, be good to me; be sweet to me, darling! Say good-by before they—she comes. I'm all right, darling. Please—please—"

He caught her to him then, and back in the sheltering cove of baggage thrust back her head, kissing deep into the veiling.

"Beautiful! Angel Beautiful!"

"Swear to me, Lester, you'll see me through."

"I swear, Beautiful."

"Swear to me, or hope to die and lose your luck!"

He kissed her again so that her hat tilted backward, straining at its pins.

"Hope to die and lose my luck."

"My own preciousness!" she said, her eyes tear-glazed and yearning up into his.

"'Sh-h, Pussy; here comes Sol Sopinsky to hurry me on board. Funny the Pelz crowd don't show up. Quit it! Here they come! That's their car. Cut it—quick!"

With noiselessly thrown clutch, the Pelz limousine drew up between an aisle of bales, its door immediately flung open. First, Mr. Pelz emerging, with an immediate arm held back for Mrs. Pelz. Last, Miss Pelz, a delightful paradox of sheer summer silk and white-fox furs, her small face flushed and carefully powdered up about the eyes.

"There he is, dad! Over there with Norma and Uncle Sol!"

"Don't run so, Bleema; he'll come over to you." But she was around and through the archipelago of baggage.

"Lester darling! There was a tie-up at Thirty-third Street. I thought I'd die! Here's a little package of letters, love, one for each day on the steamer. Lester, have you got everything—are you all ready to leave your girlie— Hello, Norma—Uncle Sol! Lester are you—you sorry to leave you—your—"

"Now, now—no water-works!"

"My all! My own boy!" She drew him, to hide the quickening trembling of her lips, back behind the shelter of piled baggage.

"Lester darling—I—I didn't sleep a wink all night! I—I'm so nervous, dear. What if a submarine should catch you? What if you meet a French girl and fall in—"

"Now, now, Reddie! Is that what you think of your boy?"

"I don't, dearest; I don't! I keep telling myself I'm a silly— What's three weeks? But when it means separation from the sweetest, dearest—"

"'Sh-h-h, Angel darling! There's the last blast, and your father's angry. See him beckoning! The company's been on board twenty minutes already. Look—there's the sailors lined up at the gang-plank—Bleema—"

"Promise me, Lester—"

"I do! I do promise! Anything! Look, girlie:

Miss Beautiful will feel hurt the way we left her standing. It isn't nice—our hiding this way."

"I can't bear, dearest, to see you go—"

"Look! See—there's David Feist come down, too. You don't want him to see my girl make a cry baby of herself over a three weeks' trip—"

"You'll write, Lester, and cable every day?"

"You just know I will!"

"You won't go near the war?"

"You just know I won't!"

"You—"

"Your father, Bleema—let's not get him sore, hiding back here. Come; they'll draw up the plank on me."

"I'll be waving out from the edge of the pier, darling. I've got a special permit to go out there. I just couldn't stand not seeing my boy up to the last second. It's terrible for you to sneak off on a boat like this, darling, without flags and music the way it was before the war. I want music and flags when my boy goes off. Oh, Lester, I'll be working so hard on the sweetest little trousseau and the sweetest little—"

"Bleema, please! There's Miss Beautiful overhearing every word. Please!" "Well, good-by, Miss Beautiful; don't walk off with the studio while we're gone—take care of yourself—"

"Good-by—Mr. Spencer—*b-bon voyage!*"

"Hi, Mr. Feist, mighty handsome of you to come down to see me off!"

"Safe journey, Spencer! Remember you've got a precious piece of anxiety waiting back here for you."

"Oh, Mr. Feist—isn't—isn't—it awful—submarine-time and all? I—I just can't bear it!"

"Now! Now! Is that the way for a brave little girl to talk?"

"Bleema, if you can't control yourself, you had better go sit in the car. I'm ashamed before the company."

"Roody, the poor child!"

"He—that's the only way papa talks to me these days—fault-finding!"

"Now, now, Miss Bleema! Here—take mine; yours is all wet."

Another blast then, reverberating into the din.

"All aboard!"

"Good-by, Lester—good-by, darling—cable every day—by—good-by—boy!"

"Good-by, little Reddie! Thanks for the beautiful fruits and letters. Good-by, Mr. Pelz!"

"Play fair in the picture, Spencer. Don't hog the scenes. Help instead of hinder Sopinsky."

"Indeed I will, sir! Good-by, Mrs. Pelz!"

"Good-by, Lester! God bless you, my boy! Take care of yourself, and remember my little girl is—"

"Lester—Lester, a cable every day!"

"Bleema, will you please let the man catch his boat? It's an embarrassment to even watch you."

"Lester—Lester—"

"Yes, yes; good-by, everybody!"

"I'll be out at the pier-edge—wave back, darling!"

"Yes, yes! Good-by, Miss Beautiful! By, all!"

And then, from an upper deck, more and more shouted farewells.

"They're moving! Come, Mr. Feist—please—with me—I've got the permit—don't let papa see us—come—the pier-edge!"

"Sure! This way, Miss Bleema—here—under—quick!"

Out in the open, May lay with Italian warmth over a harbor that kicked up the tiniest of frills. A gull cut through the blueness, winging it in festoons.

"Over this way, Miss Bleema; we can see her steaming out."

"Lester—good-by—Lester—a cable every day! I'll be waiting. Good-by!"

All this unavailingly flung to the great hulk of boat moving so proud of bow and so grandly out to sea, decks of faces and waving kerchiefs receding quickly.

"Good-by—darling—oh—oh—"

"'Sh-h—'sh-h-h, Miss Bleema. Here—take another of mine. Yours is all wet again. My—what a rainy day! Here—let me dry them for you. Hold still!"

"Oh—oh—cable every day, darling—write—oh, Mr. Feist—he don't see us—he's out of sight—don't wipe 'em so hard, Mr. Feist—you—you h-hurt!"

Out toward the blue, the billowing fields sailed away the gray steamer, cutting a path that sprayed and sang after. Sunlight danced and lay whitely as far as the eye could reach. It prolonged for those on shore the contour of the line of faces above each

deck; it picked points of light from off everywhere —off smokestacks and polished railings, off plate-glass and brass-bound port-holes and even down the ship's flank, to where gilt letters spelled out shiningly:

"*LUSITANIA*."

A BOOB SPELLED BACKWARD

HOW difficult it is to think of great lives in terms of the small mosaics that go to make up the pattern of every man's day-by-day—the too tepid shaving-water; the badly laundered shirt-front; the three-minute egg; the too-short fourth leg of the table; the draught on the neck; the bad pen; the neighboring rooster; the misplaced key; the slipping chest-protector.

Richelieu, who walked with kings, presided always at the stitching of his red robes. Boswell says somewhere that a badly starched stock could kill his Johnson's morning. It was the hanging of his own chintzes that first swayed William Morris from epic mood to household utensils. Seneca, first in Latin in the whole Silver Age, prepared his own vegetables. There is no outgrowing the small moments of life, and to those lesser ones of us how often they become the large ones!

To Samuel Lipkind, who, in a span of thirty years, had created and carried probably more than his share of this world's responsibilities, there was no more predominant moment in all his day, even to the signing of checks and the six-o'clock making of cash, than that matinal instant, just fifteen minutes

before the stroke of seven, when Mrs. Lipkind, in a fuzzy gray wrapper the color of her eyes and hair, kissed him awake, and, from across the hall, he could hear the harsh sing of his bath in the drawing.

There are moments like that which never grow old. For the fifteen years that Samuel Lipkind had reached the Two Dollar Hat Store before his two clerks, he had awakened to that same kiss on his slightly open mouth, the gray hair and the ever-graying eyes close enough to be stroked, the pungency of coffee seeming to wind like wreaths of mundane aroma above the bed, and always across the aisle of hallway that tepid cataract leaping in glory into porcelain.

Take the particular morning which ushers in our story, although it might have been any of twelve times three hundred others.

"Sammy!" This upon opening his door, then crossing to close the conservative five inches of open window and over to the bedside for the kissing him awake. "Sammy, get up!"

The snuggle away into the crotch of his elbow.

"Sammy! *Thu, thu!* I can't get him up! Sammy, a quarter to seven! You want to be late? I can't get him up!"

"M-m-m-m-m-m!"

"You want your own clerks to beat you to business so they can say they got a lazy boss?"

"I'm awake, ma." Reaching up to stroke her hair, thin and gray now, and drawn back into an early-morning knob.

"Don't splash in the bath-room so this morning, Sammy; it's a shame for the wall-paper."

"I won't"—drawing the cord of his robe about his waist, and as if they did not both of them know just how faithfully disregarded would be that daily admonition.

Then Mrs. Lipkind flung back the snowy sheets and bed-coverings, baring the striped ticking of the mattress.

"Hurry, Sammy! I'm up so long I'm ready for my second cup of coffee."

"Two minutes." And off across the hall, whistling, towel across arm.

It was that little early moment sublimated by nothing more than the fusty beginnings of a work-aday, the mere recollecting of which was one day to bring a wash of tears behind his eyes and a twist of anguish into his heart.

Next breakfast, and to dine within reach of the coal-range which brews it is so homely a fashion that even Mr. Lipkind, upon whom such matters of bad form lay as a matter of course, was wont to remonstrate.

"What's the matter with the dining-room, ma? Since when have dining-rooms gone out of style?"

Pouring his coffee from the speckled granite pot, Mrs. Lipkind would smile up and over it.

"All I ask is my son should never have it worse than to eat all his lifetime in just such a kitchen like mine. Off my kitchen floor I would rather eat than off some people's fine polished mahogany."

The mahogany was almost not far-fetched. There

was a blue-and-white spick-and-spanness about Mrs. Lipkind's kitchen which must lie within the soul of the housewife who achieves it—the lace-edged shelves, the scoured armament of dishpan, soup-pot, and what not; the white Swiss window-curtains, so starchy, and the two regimental geraniums on the sill; the roller-towel too snowy for mortal hand to smudge; the white sink, hand-polished; the bland row of blue-and-white china jars spicily inscribed to nutmeg, cinnamon, and cloves. That such a kitchen could be within the tall and brick confines of an upper-Manhattan apartment-house was only another of the thousand thousand paradoxes over which the city spreads her glittering skirts. The street within roaring distance, the highway of Lenox Avenue flowing dizzily constantly past her windows, the interior of Mrs. Lipkind's apartment, from the chromos of the dear dead upon its walls to the upholstery of another decade against those walls, was as little of the day as if the sweep of the city were a gale across a mid-Victorian plain and the flow past the windows a broad river ruffled by wind.

"You're right, ma; there's not a kitchen in New York I'd trade it for. But what's the idea of paying rent on a dining-room?"

"Sa-y, if not for when Clara comes and how in America all young people got extravagant ideas, we was just as well off without one in our three rooms in Simpson Street."

"A little more of that mackerel, please."

You to whom the chilled grapefruit and the egg-shell cup of morning coffee are a gastronomic feat

not always easy to hurdle, raise not your digestive eyebrows. At precisely fifteen minutes past seven six mornings in the week, seven-thirty, Sundays, Mrs. Lipkind and her son sat down to a breakfast that was steamingly fit for those only who dwell in the headacheless kingdom of long, sleepful nights and fur-coatless tongues.

"A few more fried potatoes with it, Sammy?"

"Whoa! You want to feed me up for the fat boys' regiment!"

Mrs. Lipkind glanced quickly away, her profile seeming to quiver. "Don't use that word, Sam—even in fun—it's a knife in me."

"What word?"

"'Regiment.'"

He reached across to pat the vein-corduroyed back of her hand.

"My little sweetheart mamma," he said.

She, in turn, put out her hand over his, her old sagging throat visibly constricting in a gulp, and her eyes as if they could never be finished with yearning over him. "You're a good boy, Sammy."

"Sure!"

"I always say no matter what it is bad my life has had for me with my twenty-five years a widow, my only daughter to marry out six hundred miles away from me, my business troubles when I had to lose the little store what your papa left me, nothing ain't nothing, Sammy, when a mother can raise for herself a boy like mine."

"You mean when a fellow can pick out for himself a little sweetheart mamma like mine."

"Sammy, stop it with your pinching-me nonsense like I was your best girl!"

"Well, ain't you?"

She paused, her cup of coffee half-way to her lips, the lines of her face seeming to want to lift into what would be a smile. "No, Sammy; your mother knows she ain't, and if she was anything but a selfish old woman, she would be glad that she ain't."

"'Sh! 'Sh!" said Mr. Lipkind, reaching this time half across the table for a still steaming muffin and opening it so that its hot fragrance came out. "'Sh! No April showers! Uh! Uh! Don't you dare!"

"I ain't," said Mrs. Lipkind, smiling through her tear and dashing at it with the back of her hand. "For why should I when I got only everything to be thankful for?"

"Now you're shouting!"

"How you think, Sammy, Clara likes a cheese pie for supper to-night? Last week I could see she didn't care much for the noodle pudding I baked her."

Mr. Lipkind, who was ever so slightly and prematurely bald and still more slightly and prematurely rotund, suffered a rush of color then, his ears suddenly and redly conspicuous.

"That's—that's what I started to tell you last night, ma. Clara telephoned over to the store in the afternoon she—she thought she wouldn't come to supper this Wednesday night, ma."

"Sammy—you—you and Clara 'ain't got nothing wrong together, the way you don't see each other so much these two months?"

"Of course not, ma; it's just happened a few times that way. The trade's in town; that's all."

"How is it all of a sudden a girl in the wholesale ribbon business should have the trade to entertain like she was in the cloak-and-suit chorus?"

"It's not that Clara's busy to-night, ma. She—she only thought she—for a change—there's a little side table for two—for three—where she boards—she thought maybe if—if you didn't mind, I'd go over to her place for Wednesday-night supper for a change. You know how a girl like Clara gets to feeling obligated."

"Obligated from eating once a week supper in her own future house!"

"She asked I should bring you, too, ma, but I know how bashful you are to go in places like that."

"In such a place where it's all style and no food—yes."

"That's it; so we—I thought, ma, that is, if you don't mind, instead of Clara here to-night for supper, I—I'd go over to her place. If you don't mind, ma."

There was a silence, so light, so slight that it would not have even held the dropping of a pin, but yet had a depth and a quality that set them both to breathing faster.

"Why, of course, Sammy, you should go!"

"I—we thought for a change."

"You should have told me yesterday, Sammy, before I marketed poultry."

"I know, ma; I—just didn't. Clara only 'phoned at four."

"A few more fried potatoes?"

"No more."

"Sit up straight, Sam, from out your round shoulders."

"You ain't—mad, ma?"

"For why, Sammy, should I be mad that you go to Clara for a change to supper. I'm glad if you get a change."

"It's not that, ma. It's just that she asked it. You know how a person feels, her taking her Wednesday-night suppers here for more than five years and never once have I—we—set foot in any of her boarding-houses. She imagines she's obligated. You know how Clara is, so independent."

"You should go. I hear, too, how Mrs. Schulem sets a good table."

"I'll be home by nine, ma—you sure you don't mind?"

"I wouldn't mind, Sammy, if it was twelve. Since when is it that a grown-up son has to apologize to his mother if he takes a step without her?"

"You can believe me, ma, but I've got so it don't seem like theater or nothing seems like going out without my little sweetheart mamma on one arm and Clara on the other."

"It's not right, Sammy, you should spoil me so. Don't think that even if you don't let me talk about it, I don't know in my heart how I'm in yours and Clara's way."

"Ma, now just you start that talk and you know what I'll do—I'll get up and leave the table."

"Sammy, if only you would let me talk about it!"

"You heard what I said."

"To think my son should have to wait with his engagement for five years and never once let his mother ask him why it is he waits. It ain't because of to-night I want to talk about it, Sam, but if I thought it was me that had stood between you and Clara all these five years, if—if I thought it was because of me you don't see each other so much here lately, I—"

"Ma!"

"I couldn't stand it, son. If ever a boy deserved happiness, that boy is you. A boy that scraped his fingers to the bone to marry his sister off well. A boy that took the few dollars left from my notion-store and made such a success in retail men's hats and has given it to his mother like a queen. If I thought I was standing in such a boy's way, who ain't only a grand business man and a grand son and brother, but would make any girl the grandest husband that only his father before him could equal, I couldn't live, Sammy, I couldn't live."

"You should know how sick such talk makes me!"

"I haven't got hard feelings, Sammy, because Clara don't like it here."

"She does."

"For why should an up-to-date American girl like Clara like such an old-fashioned place as I keep? Nowadays, girls got different ideas. They don't think nothing of seventy-five-dollar suits and twelve-dollar shoes. I can't help it that it goes against my grain no matter how fine a money-maker a girl is. In

the old country my sister Carrie and me never even had shoes on our feet until we were twelve, much less—"

"But, ma—"

"Oh, I don't blame her, Sam. I don't blame her that she don't like it the way I dish up everything on the table so we can serve ourselves. She likes it passed the way they did that night at Mrs. Goldfinger's new daughter-in-law's, where everything is carried from one to the next one, and you got to help yourself quick over your shoulders."

"Clara's like me, ma; she wants you to keep a servant to do the waiting on you."

"It ain't in me, Sam, to be bossed to by a servant, just like I can't take down off the walls pictures of your papa *selig* and your grandma, because it ain't stylish they should be there. It's a feeling in me for my own flesh and blood that nothing can change."

"Clara don't want you to change that, ma."

"She's a fine, up-to-date girl, Sam. A girl that can work herself up to head floor-lady in wholesale ribbons and forty dollars a week has got in her the kind of smartness my boy should have in his wife. I'm an old woman standing in the way of my boy. If I wasn't, I could go out to Marietta, Ohio, by Ruby, and I wouldn't keep having inside of me such terrible fears for my boy and—and how things are now on the other side and—and—"

"Now, now, ma; no April showers!"

"An old woman that can't even be happy with a good daughter like Ruby, but hangs always on her son like a stone around his neck!"

"You mean like a diamond."

"A stone, holding him down."

"Ma!" Mr. Lipkind pushed back, napkin awry at his throat and his eyes snapping points of light. "Now if you want to spoil my breakfast, just say so and I—I'll quit. Why should you be living with Ruby out in Marietta if you're happier here with me where you belong? If you knew how sore these here fits of yours make me, you'd cut them out—that's what you would. I'm not going over to Clara's at all now for supper, if that's how you feel about it."

Mrs. Lipkind rose then, crossed, leaning over the back of his chair and inclosing his face in the quivering hold of her two hands. "Sammy, Sammy, I didn't mean it! I know I ain't in your way. How can I be when there ain't a day passes I don't invite you to get married and come here to live and fix the flat any way what Clara wants or even move downtown in a finer one where she likes it? I know I ain't in your way, son. I take it back."

"Well, that's more like it."

"You mustn't be mad at mamma when she gets old-fashioned ideas in her head."

He stroked her hand at his cheek, pressing it closer.

"Sit down and finish your breakfast, little sweetheart mamma."

"Is it all right now, Sammy?"

"Of course it is!" he said, his eyes squeezed tightly shut.

"Promise mamma you'll go over by Clara's to-night."

"But—"

"Promise me, Sammy; I can't stand it if you don't."

"Alright, I'll go, ma."

The Declaration of Economic Independence is not always a subtle one. There was that about Clara Bloom, even to the rather Hellenic swing of her very tailor-made back and the firm, neat clack of her not too high heels, which proclaimed that a new century had filed her fetter-free from the nineteen-centuries-long chain of women whose pin-money had too often been blood-money or the filched shekels from trousers pocket or what in the toga corresponded thereto.

And yet, when Miss Bloom smiled, which upon occasion she did spontaneously enough to show a gold molar, there were not only Hypatia and Portia in the straight line of her lips, but lurked in the little tip-tilt at the corners a quirk from Psyche, who loved and was so loved, and in the dimple in her chin a manhole, as it were, for Mr. Samuel Lipkind.

At six o'clock, where the wintry workaday flows into dusk and Fifth Avenue flows across Broadway, they met, these two, finding each other out in the gaseous shelter of a Subway kiosk. She from the tall, thin, skylightless skyscraper dedicated to the wholesale supply of woman's insatiable demand for the ribbon gewgaw; he from a plate-glass shop with his name inscribed across its front and more humbly given over to the more satiable demand of the male for the two-dollar hat. There was a gold-and-

black sign which ran across the not inconsiderable width of Mr. Lipkind's store-front and which invariably captioned his four inches of Sunday-newspaper advertisement:

SAMMY LIPKIND WANTS YOUR HEAD

As near as it is possible for the eye to simulate the heart, there was exactly that sentiment in his glance now as he found out Miss Bloom, she in a purple-felt hat and the black scallops of escaping hair, blacker because the red was out in her cheeks.

He broke into the kind of smile that lifted his every feature, screw-lines at his eyes coming out, head bared, and his greeting beginning to come even before she was within hearing distance of it.

There was in Mr. Lipkind precious little of Lothario, Launcelot, Galahad, or any of that blankety-blank-verse coterie. There remains yet unsung the lay of the five-foot-five, slightly bald, and ever so slightly rotund lover. Falstaff and Romeo are the extremes of what Mr. Lipkind was the not unhappy medium. Offhand in public places, men would swap crop conditions and city politics with him. Twice, tired mothers in railway stations had volunteered him their babies to dandle. Young women, however, were not all impervious to him, and uncrossed their feet and became consciously unconscious of him across street-car aisles. In his very Two Dollar Hat Store, Sara Minniesinger, hooked of profile, but who had impeccably kept his

debits and credits for twelve years back under the stock-balcony and a green eye-shade, was wont to cry of evenings over and for him into her dingy pillow. He was so unconscious of this that, on the twelfth anniversary of her incarceration beneath the stock-balcony, he commissioned his mother to shop her a crown of thorns in the form of a gold-handled umbrella with a bachelor-girl flash-light attachment.

There are men like that, to whom life is not only a theosophy of one God, but of one women who is sufficient thereof. When Samuel Lipkind greeted Clara Bloom there was just that in his ardently appraising glance.

"Didn't mean to keep you waiting, Clara—a last-minute customer. *You* know."

"I've been counting red heads and wishing the Subway was pulled by white horses."

"Say, Clara, but you look a picture! Believe me, Bettina, that is some lid!"

Miss Bloom tucked up a rear strand of curl, turning her head to extreme profile for his more complete approval.

"Is it an elegant trifle, Sam? I ask you is it an elegant trifle?"

"Clara, it's—immense! The best yet! What did it set you back?"

"Don't ask me! I'm afraid just saying it would give your mother heart-failure by mental telepathy."

He linked her arm. "Whatever you paid, it's worth the money. It sets you off like a gipsy queen."

"None of that, Sam! Mush is fattening."

"Mush nothing! It's the truth."

"Hurry. Schulem's got a new rule—no reserving the guest-table."

They let themselves be swept into the great surge of the underground river with all of the rather thick-skinned unsensitiveness to shoulder-to-shoulder contact which the Subway engenders. Swaying from straps in a locked train, which tore like a shriek through a tube whose sides sweated dampness, they talked in voices trained to compete with the roar.

"What's the idea, Clara? When you telephoned yesterday I was afraid maybe it was—Eddie Leonard cutting in on my night again."

"Eddie nothing. Is it a law, Sam, that I have to eat off your mother every Wednesday night of my life?"

"No—only—you know how it is when you get used to things one way."

"I told you I had something to talk over, didn't I?"

They were rounding a curve now, so that they swayed face to face, nose to nose.

A few crinkles, frequent with him of late, came out in rays from his eyes.

"Is it anything you—you couldn't say in front of ma?"

"Yes."

He inserted two fingers into his collar, rearing back his head.

"Anything wrong, Clara?"

"You mean is anything right."

They rode in silence after that, both of them read-

ing in three colors the border effulgencies of frenzied advertising.

But when they emerged to a quieter up-town night that was already pointed with a first star, he took her arm as they turned off into a side-street that was architecturally a barracks to the eye, brownstone front after brownstone front after brownstone front. Block after block of New York's side-streets are sunk thus in brown study.

"You mustn't be so ready to be put out over every little thing I say, Clara. Is it anything wrong to want you up at the house just as often as we can get you?"

"No, Sam; it ain't that."

"Well then, what is it?"

"Oh, what's the use beginning all that again? I want to begin to-night where we usually leave off."

"Is it—is it something we've talked about before, Clara?"

"Yes—and no. We've talked so much and so long without ever getting anywheres—what's the difference whether we've ever talked it before or not?"

"You just wait, Clara; everything is going to come out fine for us."

Her upper lip lifted slightly. "Yes," she said; "I've heard that before."

"We're going to be mighty happy some day, just the same, and don't you let yourself forget it. We've got good times ahead."

"Oh dear!" she sighed out.

"What?"

"Nothing."

He patted her arm. "You'll never know, Clara, the torture it's been for me even your going out those few times with Eddie Leonard has put me through. You're mine, Clara; a hundred Eddies couldn't change that."

"Who said anybody wanted to change it?"

He patted her arm again very closely. "You're a wonderful girl, Clara."

They turned up the stoop of Mrs. Schulem's boarding-house, strictly first-class. How they flourish in the city, these institutions of the Not Yet, the Never Was, the Never Will Be, and the Has Been! They are the half-way houses going up and the mausoleums coming down life's incline, and he who lingers is lost to the drab destiny of this or that third-floor-back hearthstone, hot and cold running water, all the comforts of home. That is why, even as she moved up from the rooming- to the boarding-house and down from the third-floor back to the second-story front, there was always under Clara Bloom's single bed the steamer-trunk scarcely unpacked, and in her heart the fear that, after all, this might not be transiency, but home. That is why, too, she paid her board by the week and used printed visiting-cards.

And yet, if there exists such a paradox as an aristocracy among boarding-houses, Mrs. Schulem's was of it. None of the boiled odors lay on her hallways, which were not papered, but a cream-colored frèsco of better days. There was only one pair of bisques, no folding-bed, and but the slightest touch

of dried grasses in her unpartitioned front parlor. The slavey who opened the door was black-faced, white-coated, and his bedraggled skirts were trousers with a line of braid up each seam. Two more of him were also genii of the basement dining-hall, two low rooms made into one and entirely bisected by a long-stemmed T of dining-table, and between the lace-curtained windows a small table for two, with fairly snowy napkins flowering out of its water-tumblers, and in its center a small island of pressed-glass vinegar-cruet, bottle of darkly portentous condiment, glass of sugar, and another of teaspoons.

It was here that Miss Bloom and Mr. Lipkind finally settled themselves, snugly and sufficiently removed from the T-shaped battalion of eyes and ears to insure some privacy.

"Well," said Mr. Lipkind, unflowering his napkin, spreading it across his knees, and exhaling, "this is fine!"

There was an aura of authoritativeness seemed to settle over Miss Bloom.

This to one of the black-faced genii: "Take care of us right to-night, Johnson, and I'll fix it up with you. See if you can't manage it in the kitchen to bring us a double portion of those banana fritters I see they're eating at the big table. Say they're for Miss Bloom. I'll fix it up with you."

"Now, Clara, don't you go bothering with extras for me. This is certainly fine. Sorry you never asked me before."

"You know why I never asked you before."

"Why, you never saw the like how pleased ma was. She was the first one to fall in with the idea of my coming to-night."

She dipped into a shallow plate of amber soup. "I know," she said, "all about that."

"Ma's a good sport about being left at home alone."

"How do you know? You never tried it until to-night. I'll bet it's the first time since that night you first met me, five years ago, at Jerome Fertig's, and it wouldn't have been then if she hadn't had the neuralgia and it was your own clerk's wedding."

He laid down his spoon, settling back a bit from the table, pulling the napkin across his knees out into a string.

"I thought we'd gone all over that, Clara."

"Yes; but where did it get us? That's why we're here to-night, Sam—to get somewheres."

He crumbed his bread. "What do you mean, Clara?"

She forced his slow gaze to hers calmly, her hands outstretched on the table between them. "I've made up my mind, Sam. Things can't go on this way no longer between us."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that we've either got to act or quit."

He was rolling the bread pills again, a flush rising. "You know where I stand, Clara, on things between us."

"Yes, Sam, and now you know where I stand." The din of the dining-room surged over the pause between them. Still in the purple hat, and her wrap

thrown back over her chair, she held that pause coolly, level of eye. "I'm thirty-one now, Sam, three weeks and two days older than you. I don't see the rest of my days with the Arnstein Ribbon Company. I'm not getting any younger. Five years is a long time out of a girl's life. Five of the best ones, too. She likes to begin to see her future when she reaches my age. A future with a good providing man. You and me are just where we started five years ago."

"I know, Clara, and I'd give my right hand to change things."

"If I'd been able to save a cent, it might be different. But I haven't—I'm that way. I make big and spend big. But you can't blame a girl for wanting to see her future. That's me, and I'm not ashamed to say it."

"If only, Clara, I could get you to see things my way. If you'd be willing to try it with ma. Why, with a little diplomacy from you, ma'd move heaven and earth to please you."

"There's no use beginning that, Sam; it's a waste of time. Why—why, just the difference in the way me and—and your mother feel on money matters is enough. There's no use to argue that with me; it's a waste of time."

He lifted and let droop his shoulders with something of helplessness in the gesture. "What's the use, then? I'm sure I don't know what more to say to you, Clara. Oh, don't think my mother don't realize how things are between us—it's all I can do to keep denying and denying."

"Well, you can't say she knows from my telling."

"No; but there's not a day she don't say to me, particularly these last few times since you been breaking your dates with us pretty regular—I—well she sees how it worries me, and there's not a day she don't say to me, 'Sammy,' she said to me, only this morning, 'if I thought I was keeping you and Clara apart—'"

"A blind man could see it."

"There's not a day passes over her head she don't offer to go to live with my sister in Ohio, when I know just how that one month of visiting her that time nearly killed her."

"Funny visiting an own daughter could nearly kill anybody."

"It's my brother-in-law, Clara. My mother couldn't no more live with Isadore Katz than she could fly. He's a fine fellow and all that, but she's not used to a man in the house that potters around the kitchen and the children's food and things like Isadore loves to. She's used to her own little home and her own little way."

"Exactly."

"If I want to kill my mother, Clara, all I got to do is put her away from me in her old age. Even my sister knows it. 'Sammy,' she wrote to me that time after ma's visit out there, 'I love our mother like you do, but I got a nervous husband who likes his own ways about the housekeeping and the children and the cooking, and nobody knows better than me that the place for ma to be happy is with you in her own home and her own ways of doing.'"

"I call that a nerve for a sister to let herself out like that."

"It's not nerve, Clara; it's the truth. Ruby's a good girl in her way."

"What about you—ain't your life to be thought of? Ain't it enough she was married off with enough money for her husband to buy a half-interest in a ladies' ready-to-wear store out there?"

"Why, if I was to bring my little wife to that flat of ours, Clara, or any other kind further down-town that she'd want to pick out for herself, I think my mother would just walk on her hands and knees to make things pleasant for her. Maybe you don't know it, but on your Wednesday nights up at the house, she is up at five o'clock in the morning fixing around and cooking the things she thinks you'll like."

"I'm not saying a word against your mother, Sam. I think she's a grand woman, and I admire a fellow that's good to his mother. I always say, 'Give me a fellow every time that is good to his mother and that fellow will be good to his wife.'"

"I'm not pretending to say ma mayn't be a little peculiar in her ways, but you never saw an old person that wasn't, did you? Neither am I saying it's exactly any girl's idea to start out married life with a third person in—"

"I've always swore to myself, Sam, and I'm not ashamed to admit it, that if I can't marry to improve myself, I'm going to stay single till I can. I'm not a six-dollar-a-week stenog that has to marry for enough to eat. I can afford to buy a seventy-five

dollar suit every winter of my life and twelve-dollar shoes every time I need them. The hat on my head cost me eighteen-fifty wholesale, without having to be beholding to nobody, and—"

"Ma don't mean those things, Clara. It's just when she hears the price girls pay for things nowadays she can't help being surprised the way things have changed."

"I'm not a small potato, Sam. I never could live like a small potato."

"Why, you know there's nothing I like better than to see you dressed in the best that money can buy. You heard what I said about that hat just now, didn't you? Whatever it cost, it's worth it. I can afford to dress my little wife in the best that comes. There's nothing too good for her."

"Yes; but—"

"All ma needs, Clara, is a little humoring. She's had to stint so all her life, it's a little hard to get her used to a little prosperity. Take me. Why, if I bring her home a little shawl or a pockabook that cost, say, ten dollars, you think I tell her? No. I say, 'Here's a bargain I picked up for three ninety-eight,' and right away she's happy with something reduced."

"Your mother and me, Sam, and, mind you, I'm not saying she isn't a grand old lady, wasn't no more made to live together than we was made to fly. I couldn't no more live her way than she could live mine. I've got a practical head on my shoulders —I don't deny it—and I want to improve ourselves in this world when we marry, and have an up-to-date

home like every young couple that starts out nowadays."

"Sure, we—"

"That flat of yours up there or any other one under the conditions would be run like the ark. I'm an up-to-date girl, I am. There's not a girl living would be willing to marry a well-off fellow like you and go huck herself in a place she couldn't even have the running of herself or have her own say-so about the purse-strings. It may sound unbecoming, but when I marry I'm going to better myself, I am."

"I—why—"

"If she can't even stand for her own son-in-law walking into his own kitchen in his own house—Oh, you don't find me starting my married life that way at this late date. I haven't held off five years for that."

Mr. Lipkind pushed back his but slightly tasted food, lines of strain and a certain whiteness out in his face. "It—it just seems awful, Clara, this going around in a circle and not getting anywheres."

"I'm at the end of my rope, I am."

"I see your point in a way, Clara, but, my God! a man's mother is his mother! It's eating up my life just as it's eating yours, but what you going to do about it? It just seems the best years of our life are going, waiting for God knows what."

Hands clasped until her finger-nails whitened, Miss Bloom leaned across the table, her voice careful and concentrated. "Now you said something! That's why you and me are here alone together to-

night. There's not going to be a sixth year of this kind of waiting between us. Things have got to come to a head. I've got a chance, Sam, to marry. Eddie Leonard has asked me."

"I—thought so."

"Eddie Leonard ain't a Sam Lipkind, but after the war his five-thousand-dollar job is down at Arnstein's waiting for him, and he's got a good stiff bank-account saved as good as yours and—and no strings to it. I believe in a girl facing those facts the same as any other facts. Why, I—this war and all—why, if anything was to happen to you to-morrow—us unmarried this way—I'd be left high and dry without so much as a penny to show for the best five years of my life. We've got to do one thing or another, Sam. I believe in a girl being practical as well as romantic."

"I—see your point, Clara."

"I'm done with going around in this circle of ours."

"You mean—"

"You know what I mean."

The lower half of Mr. Lipkind's face seemed to lock, as it were, into a kind of rigidity which shot out his lower jaw. "I'll see Eddie Leonard burning like brimstone before I let him have you!"

"Well?"

"God! I don't know what to say—I don't know what to say!"

"That's your trouble, Sam; you're so chicken-hearted you—"

"My father died when I was five, Clara, and no

matter what my feelings are to you, there's no power on earth can make me quit having to be him as well as a son to my mother. Maybe it sounds softy to you—but if I got to pay with her happiness for—ours—then I never want happiness to the day I die."

"In other words, it's the mother first."

"Don't put it that way—it's her—age—first. It ain't what she wants and don't want; it's what she's got to have. My mother couldn't live away from me."

"She could if you were called to war."

There was something electric in the silence that followed, something that seemed to tighten the gaze of each for the other.

"But I haven't been—yet."

"The next draft will get you."

"Maybe."

"Well, what 'll you do then?"

"That's something me and ma haven't ever discussed. The war hasn't been mentioned in our house for two years—except that the letters don't come from Germany, and that's a grief to her. There's enough time for her to cross that bridge when we come to it. She worries about it enough."

"If I was a man I'd enlist, I would!"

"I'd give my right hand to. Every other night I dream I'm a lieutenant."

"Why, there's not a fellow I know that hasn't beaten the draft to it and enlisted for the kind of service he wants. I know a half a dozen who have got in the home guard and things and have saved

themselves by volunteering from being sent to France."

"I wouldn't dodge the front thataway. I'd like to enlist as a private and then work myself up to lieutenant and then on up to captain and get right into the fray on the front. I—"

"You bet, if I was a fellow, I'd enlist for the kind of home service I wanted—that's what Eddie and all the fellows are doing."

"So would I, Clara, if I was what you call a—free man. There's nobody given it more thought than me."

"Well, then, why don't you? Talk's cheap."

"You know why, Clara, to get back to going around in a circle again."

"But you've got to go, sooner or later. You've got a comfortable married sister and independent circumstances of your own to keep your mother; you haven't got a chance for exemption."

"I don't want exemption."

"Well, then, beat the draft to it."

"I— Most girls ain't so anxious to—to get rid of their best fellows, Clara."

"Silly! Can't you see the point? If—if you'd enlist and go off to camp, I—I could go and live near you there like Birdie Harberger does her husband. See?"

"You mean—"

"Then—God forbid anything should happen to you!—I'm your wife. You see, Sam?"

"Why, Clara—"

"You see what I mean. But nothing can happen

this way, because if you try to enlist in some mechanical department where they need you in this country —you see, Sam? See?"

"I—see."

"Your mother would have to get used to things then, Sam—it would be the easiest for her. An old lady like her couldn't go trailing around the outskirts of a camp like your wife could. Think of the comfort it 'll be to her to have me with you if she can't be. She'll get so used to—living alone—"

"I— You mustn't talk that way to me, Clara. When I'm called to serve my country, I'm the first one that will want to go. I've given more money already than I can afford to help the boys who are at the front. So far as I'm concerned, enlisting like this with—with you—around, would be the happiest thing ever happened to me, but—well, you see for yourself."

"You mean, then, you won't?"

"I mean, Clara, I can't."

She was immediately level of tone again and pushed back, placing her folded napkin beside her place, patting it down.

"Well, then, Sam, I'm done."

"'Done,' Clara?"

"Yep. That lets me out. I've given you every chance to make this thing possible. Your mother is no better and no different than thousands and thousands of other mothers who are giving their sons, only, she is better off than most, because she's provided for. It's all right for a fellow's mother to come first, maybe. but if his wife isn't even to

come second or third or tenth, then it's about time to call quits. I haven't made up my mind to this in a day. I'm done."

"Clara—"

"Ed has asked me. I don't pretend he's my ideal, but he's more concerned about my future than he is about anybody else's. If I'm ready to leave with him on that twelve-o'clock train for Boston to-morrow, where he's going to be put in the clerical corps at Camp Usonis, we'll be married there to-morrow night, and I'll settle down somewhere near camp as long as I can. He's got a good nest-egg if—God forbid!—anything should happen. That's the whole thing in a nutshell."

"My God! Clara, this is awful! Eddie Leonard he's not your kind; he—"

"I've given you first chance, Sam. That proves how you stand with me. A one! Ace high! First! Nobody can ever take your place with me. Don't be a boob coming and going, Sam; you're one now not to see things and you'll be another one spelled backward if you don't help yourself to your chance when it comes. You've got your life in front of you, and your mother's got hers in back of her. Now choose."

"My God! Clara, this is—terrible! Why—I'd rather be a thousand boobs than take my mother's heart and tear it to pieces."

"You won't?"

"I can't."

"Don't say that, Sam. Go home and—sleep on it. Think it over. Please! Come to your senses,

honey. Telephone me at eleven to keep me from catching that twelve-o'clock train. Don't let me take it with Eddie. Think it over, Sam. Honey—our—future—don't throw it away! Don't let me take that twelve-o'clock train!"

There were tears streaming from her eyes, and her lips, so carefully firm, were beginning to tremble. "You can't blame a girl, Sam, for wanting to provide for her future. Can you, Sam? Think it over. Please! I'll be praying when eleven o'clock comes to-morrow morning for you to telephone me. Please, Sam—think!"

He dropped his face low, lower toward the table, trembling under the red wave that surged over him and up into the roots of his hair. "I'll think it over, Clara—my girl—my own girl!"

As if the moments themselves had been woven by her flying amber needles into a whole cloth of meditation, Mrs. Lipkind, beside a kitchen lamp that flowed in gracious light, knitted the long, quiet hours of her evening into fabric, her face screwed and out of repose and occasionally the lips moving. Age is prone to that. Memories love to be mumbled and chewed over—the unconscious kind of articulation which comes with the years and for which youth has a wink and a quirk.

A tiger cat with overfed sides and a stare that seemed to doze purred on the window-ledge, gold and unswerving of eye. The silence was like the singing inside of a shell, and into it rocked Mrs. Lipkind.

By nine o'clock she was already glancing up at the clock, cocking her head to each and every of night's creaks.

By half after nine there were small and frequent periods of peering through cupped hands down into a street so remote that its traffic had neither shape nor identity. Once she went down a long slit of hallway to the front door, opening it and gazing out upon a fog-filled corridor that was papered in embossed leatherette, one speckled incandescent bulb lighting it sadly. There was something impregnable, even terrible to her in the featureless stare of the doors of three adjoining apartments. She tiptoed, almost ran, poor dear! with the consciousness of some one at her heels, back to the kitchen, where at least was the warm print of the cat's presence; fell to knitting again, clacking her needles for the solace of explainable sound.

Identically with the round moment of ten Mr. Lipkind entered, almost running down the hallway.

"Hello, ma! Think I got lost? Just got to talking and didn't realize. Haven't been worried, ma? Afraid?"

She lifted her head from his kiss. "'Afraid!' What you take me for? For why should I be worried at only ten o'clock? Say, I'm glad if you stay out for recreation."

He kissed her again, shaking out of his coat and unwinding his muffler. "I could just see you walking the floor and looking out of the window."

"Sa-y, I been so busy all evening I didn't have time to think. I'm not such a worrier no more

like I used to be. Like the saying is—life is too short."

He drew up beside her, lifting her needles off her work. "Little sweetheart mamma, why don't you sit on the big sofa in the front room where it's more comfortable?"

"You can't make, Sammy, out of a pig's ear a silk stocking."

He would detain her hands, his eyes puckered and, so intent upon her.

"You had a good time, Sammy?"

"You'd be surprised, ma, what a nice place Clara boards at."

"What did they have to eat? Good cooking?"

"Not for a fellow that's used to my boarding-house."

"What?"

"I couldn't tell if it was soup or finger-bowls they served for the first course."

"I know—stylish broth. Let me warm you up a little of my thick barley soup that's left over from—"

He pressed her down. "Please, ma! I'm full up. I couldn't. They had pink ice-cream, too, with pink cake and—"

"Such mess-food what is bad for you. I'm surprised how Clara keeps her good complexion. Let me fix you some fried—"

"Ma, I tell you I couldn't. It's ten o'clock. You mustn't try to fatten me up so. In war-time a man has got to be lean."

She sat back suddenly and whitely quiet. "That's —twice already to-day, Sam, you talk like that."

He took up her lax hand, moving each separate finger up and down, eyes lowered. "Why not? Doesn't it ever strike you, mamma, that you and me are—are kidding ourselves along on this war business, pretending to each other there ain't no war?"

She laid a quick hand to her breast. "What you mean, Sammy?"

"Why, you know what I mean, ma. I notice you read the war news pretty closely, all right."

"Sammy, you mean something!"

"Now, ma, there's no need to get excited right away. Think of the mothers who haven't even got bank-accounts whose sons have got to go."

"Sammy—you 'ain't been—"

"No, no; I haven't."

"You have! I can see it in your face! You've come home with some news to break. You been drafted!"

He held her arms to her sides, still pressing her down to her chair. "I tell you I haven't! Can't you take my word for it?"

"Swear to me, Sammy!"

"All right; I swear."

"Swear to me on your dead father who is an angel in heaven!"

"I swear—thataway."

She was still pressing against her breathing. "You're keeping something back. Sammy, is it that we got mail from Germany? From Aunt Carrie? Bad news— O my God!"

"No! No! Who could I get mail from there any more than you've been getting it for the last two

years? Mamma, if you're going to be this excitable and get yourself sick, I won't talk over anything with you. I'll quit."

"You got something, Sammy, to break to me. I can read you like a book."

"I'm done. If I can't talk facts over with you without your going to pieces this way, I'm done. I quit."

She clasped her hands, her face pleading up to him. "Sammy, what is it? If you don't tell me, I can't stand it. Sammy?"

"Will you sit quiet and not get excited?"

"Please, Sammy, I will."

"It's this: you see, ma, the way the draft goes. When a fellow's called to war, drafted, he's got to go, no questions asked. But when a fellow enlists for war, volunteers, you see, before the government calls him, then thataway he can pick out for himself the thing he wants to be in the army. Y'see? And then maybe the thing he picks out for himself can keep him right here at home. Y'see, ma—so he don't have to go away. See the point?"

"You mean when a boy enlists he offers himself instead of gets offered."

"Exactly."

"You got something behind all this. You mean you—you want to enlist."

"Now, ma—you see, if I was to enlist—and stay right here in this country—with you near the camp or, as long as it's too rough life for you, with—with Clara there—a woman to look in on—"

"Sammy—you mean it's enlistment!"

Her voice rose in velocity; he could feel her pulse run beneath his fingers.

"It's the best way, ma. The draft is sure to get me. Let me beat it and keep myself home—near you. We might as well face the music, ma. They'll get me one way or another. Let me enlist now, ma. Like a man. Right away. For my country!"

Do you know the eyes of Bellini's "Agony in a Garden"? Can you hear for yourself the note that must have been Cassandra's when she shouted out her forebodings? There were these now in the glance and voice of Mrs. Lipkind as she drew back from him, her face actually seeming to shrivel.

"No, Sammy! No! No! No!"

"Ma—please—"

"You wouldn't! You couldn't! No, Sammy—my son!"

"Ma, for God's sake don't go on so!"

"Then tell me you wouldn't! Against your own flesh and blood! Tell me you wouldn't!"

"No, no, ma! For God's sake, don't take a fit—a stroke—no, no; I wouldn't—I wouldn't!"

"Your own blood, Sammy! Your own baby cousins what I tucked you in bed with—mine own sister's children! Her babies what slept with you. Mine own sister who raised me and worked down her hands to the bone to make it so with my young husband and baby we could come to America—no—no!"

"Mamma, for God's sakes—"

"Three years like a snake here inside of it's eating me—all night—all day— I'm a good American,

Sammy; I got so much I should be thankful for to America. Twenty-five years it's my home, the home where I had prosperity and good treatment, the home where I had happiness with your papa and where he lies buried, but I can't give you to fight against my own, Sammy—to be murdered by your own—my sister what never in her life harmed a bird—my child and her children—cousins—against each other. My beautiful country what I remember with cows and green fields and clover—always the smell of clover. It ain't human to murder against your own flesh and blood for God knows what reason!"

"Mamma, there is a reason it—"

"I tell you I'm a good American, Sammy. For America I give my last cent, but not to stick knives in my own—it ain't human— Why didn't I die before we got war? What good am I here? In my boy's way for his country—his marriage—his happiness—why don't I die?"

"Ma, I tell you you mustn't! You're making yourself sick. Let me fan you. Here, ma, I didn't mean it. See—I'm holding you tight. I won't never let go. You're my little sweetheart mamma. You mustn't tremble like that. I'm holding you tight—tight—little mamma."

"My boy! My little boy! My son! My all! All in their bed together. Three. Her two. Mine. The smell of clover—my boy—Sammy—Sam—" She fainted back into his arms suddenly, very white and very quiet and very shriveled.

He watched beside her bed the next five hours of the night, his face so close above hers that, when

she opened her eyes, his were merged into one for her, and the clasp of his hand never left hers.

"You all right, ma? Sure? Sure you don't need the doctor?"

She looked up at him with a tired, a burned-out, an ashamed smile. "The first time in my life, Sammy, such a thing ever happened to me."

He pressed a chain of close kisses to the back of her hand, his voice far from firm. "It was me, ma. I'll never forgive myself. My little mamma, my little mamma sweetheart!"

"I feel fine, son; only, with you sitting here all night, you don't let me sleep for worry that you ain't in bed."

"I love it. I love to sit here by you and watch you sleep. You're sure you've no fever? Sure?"

"I'm well, Sammy. It was nothing but what you call a fainting-fit. For some women it's nothing that they should faint every time they get a little bit excited. It's nothing. Feel my hands—how cool! That's always a sign—coolness."

He pressed them both to his lips, blowing his warm breath against them.

"There now—go to sleep."

The night-light burning weakly, the great black-walnut bedstead ponderous in the gloom, she lay there mostly smiling and always shamefaced.

"Such a thing should happen to me at my age!"

"Try to sleep, ma."

"Go in your room to bed, and then I get sleep. Do you want your own clerks should beat you to business to-morrow?"

"A little whisky?"

"Go away; you got me dosed up enough with such *Schnapps*."

"The light lower?"

"No. If you don't go in your room, I lay here all night with my eyes open, so help me!"

He rose, stiff and sore-kneed, hair awry, and his eyes with the red rims of fatigue. "You'll sure ring the little bell if you want anything, ma?"

"Sure."

"You promise you won't get up to fix breakfast."

"If I don't feel good, I let you fix mine."

"Good night, little sweetheart mamma."

"You ain't—mad at me, Sam?"

"Mad! Why, ma, you mustn't ask me a—a thing like that; it just kills me to hear you. Me that's not even fit to black your shoes! Mad at you? Why, I—I— Good night—good—night—ma."

At just fifteen minutes before seven, to the pungency of coffee and the harsh sing of water across the hall, Mrs. Lipkind in a fuzzy wrapper the color of her eyes and hair, kissed her son awake.

"Sam! Sammy! Get up! *Thu, thu!* I can't get him up in the morning!"

The snuggle away and into the crotch of his elbow.

"Sam-my—quarter to seven!"

He sprang up then, haggard, but in a flood of recollection and remorse. "Ma, I must 'a' dropped off at the last minute. You all right? What are you doing up? Go right back! Didn't I tell you not to get up?"

"I been up an hour already; that's how fine I feel. Get up, Sammy; it's late."

He flung on his robe, trying to withdraw her from the business of looping back the bed-clothing over the foot-board and pounding into the pillows.

"I tell you I won't have it! You got to lay in bed this morning."

"I'm all right, Sammy. Wouldn't I say so if I wasn't?" But she sat down rather weakly on the edge of the bed, holding the right side of her. breathing too hard.

"I—I shouldn't have beat that pillow is all. Let me get my breathing. I'm all right." Nevertheless, she let him relax her to his pillow, draw the covers down from the footboard, and cover her.

"This settles it," he said, quietly. "I'm going to get a doctor."

She caught his hand. "If—if you want to get me excited for sure, just you call a doctor—now—before I talk with you a minute—I want to talk—I'm all right, Sammy, if you let me talk to you. One step to that telephone, and I get excited—"

"Please, ma—"

"Sammy?"

"Yes."

"Will you listen to me and do like I want it?"

"Yes."

"I—been a bad old woman."

"That's right—break my heart."

"I got a brave boy for a son, and I want to make from him a coward."

"Ma—please!"

"I laid saying to myself all night, a mother should have such a son like mine and make things hard for him yet!"

"Please, get it all out of your head—"

"From America what has given to me everything I should hold back my son from fighting for. In war, it ain't your own flesh and blood what counts; it's the flesh and blood of your country—not, Sam? I been thinking only it's my family affair. If God lets be such a terrible thing like war, there is somewhere a good reason for it. I want you to enlist, Sammy, for your country. Not for in an office, but for where they need you. I want you to enlist to get some day to be such a lieutenant and a captain like you used to play it with tin soldiers. I want—"

"Mamma, mamma, you know you don't mean it!"

"I want it, I tell you. All night I worked on it how dumb I've been, not right away to see it—last night. With Clara near you in the camp—"

"Ma, I didn't mean it that way; I—"

"Clara near you for a woman to look in on, I been so dumb not to right away see it. I'm glad you let it out, Sam. I wouldn't take five thousand dollars it didn't happen— I feel fine—I want it—I—"

"I didn't mean it, ma—I swear! Don't rub it in this way—please—please—"

"Why, I never wanted anything in my life like I want this, Sammy—that you should enlist—a woman to look in on—I been a bad woman, Sammy, I—I—oh—"

It was then that Mr. Lipkind tore to the telephone,

his hands so frenzied that they would not properly hold the receiver.

At eight o'clock, and without even a further word, Mrs. Lipkind breathed out quietly, a little tiredly, and yet so eloquent of eye. To her son, pleading there beside her for the life she had not left to give, it was as if the swollen bosom of some stream were carrying her rapidly but gently down its surface, her gaze back at him and begging him to stay the current.

"Mamma! Darling! Doctor—please—for God's sakes—please—she wants something—she can't say it—give it to her! Try to make her tell me what she wants—she wants something—this is terrible—don't let her want something—mamma—just one word to me—try—try—O my God—Doctor—"

A black arm then reached down to withdraw him from the glazed stare which had begun to set in from the pillow.

By ten o'clock a light snow had set in, blowing almost horizontally across the window-pane. He sat his second hour there in a rather forward huddle beside the drawn shade of that window, the *sotto-voce* comings and goings, all the black-coated *parvenus* that follow the wake of death, moving about him. A clock shaped like a pilot's wheel, a boyhood property which had marked the time of twenty years, finally chimed the thin, tin stroke of eleven and after a swimming, nebulous interval, twelve. He glanced up each time with his swollen eyes, and then almost automatically out to the wall telephone in the hall opposite the open door. But he did not move.

In fact, for two more hours sat there impervious to proffered warmth of word or deed. Meanwhile, the snow behind the drawn shade had turned to rain that beat and washed against the pane.

Just so the iciness that had locked Samuel Lipkind seemed suddenly to melt in a tornado of sobs that swept him, felled him into a prostration of the terrible tears that men weep.

At a training-camp—somewhere—from his side of a tent that had flapped like a captive wing all through a wind-swept night, Lieutenant Lipkind stirred rather painfully for a final snuggle into the crotch of an elbow that was stiff with chill and night damp.

Out over the peaked city that had been pitched rather than built, and on beyond over the frozen stubble of fields, sounded the bugle-cry of the reveille, which shrills so potently:

I can't get 'em up; I can't get 'em up;
I can't get 'em up in the morn—ing!

EVEN AS YOU AND I

THERE is an intensity about September noonday on Coney Island, aided and abetted by tin roofs, metallic façades, gilt domes, looking-glass fronts, jeweled spires, screaming peanut- and frankfurter-stands, which has not its peculiar kind of equal this side of opalescent Tangiers. Here the sea air can become a sort of hot camphor-ice to the cheek, the sea itself a percolator, boiling up against a glass surface. Beneath the tin roofs of Ocean Avenue the indoor heat takes on the kind of intense density that is cotton in the mouth and ringing in the ears.

At one o'clock the jibberwock exteriors of Ocean Avenue begin fantastic signs of life. The House of Folly breaks out, over its entire façade, into a chicken-pox of red and green, blue and purple, yellow, violet, and gold electric bulbs. The Ocean Waves concession begins its side-splitting undulations. Maha Mahadra, India's foremost soothsayer (down in police, divorce, and night courts as Mamie Jones, May Costello, and Mabel Brown, respectively), loops back her spangled portière. The Baby Incubator slides open its ticket-windows. Five carousals begin to whang. A row of hula-hula girls in paper necklaces appears outside of "Hawaii," gelatinously

naughty and insinuating of hip. There begins a razzling of the razzle-dazzle. Shooting-galleries begin to snipe into the glittering noon, and the smell of hot spiced sausages and stale malt to lay on the air.

Before the Palace of Freaks, a barker slanted up his megaphone, baying to the sun:

"Y-e-a-o-u! Y-e-a-o-u! The greatest show on the Island! Ten cents to see the greatest freak congress in the world. Shapiro's freaks are gathered from every corner of the universe. Enter and shake hands with Baron de Ross, the children's delight, the world's smallest human being; age, forty-two years, eight months; height, twenty-eight inches; weight, fourteen and one-half pounds, certified scales. Enter and see the original and only authentic Siamese Twins! The Ossified Man! You are cordially invited to stick pins into this mystery of the whole medical world. Jastrow, the world's most famous strong man and glass-eater, will perform his world-startling feats. Show about to begin! Our glass-eater eats glass, not rock candy—any one doubting same can sample it first. We have on view within, and all included in your ten-cents admission, the famous Teenie, absolutely the heaviest woman in captivity. We guarantee Teenie to tip the certified scales at five hundred and fifty-five, a weight unsurpassed by any of the heavyweights in the history of the show business. Come in and fox-trot with Teenie, the world wonder. Come in and fox-trot with her. Show begins immediately. Y-e-a-o-u! Y-e-a-o-u!"

Within the Palace of Freaks, her platform elevated and railed in against the unduly curious, Miss Luella Hoag, all that she was so raucously purported to be, sat back in her chair, as much in the attitude of relaxing as her proportions would permit.

There is no way in which I can hope to salve your offended estheticisms with any of Miss Hoag's better points. What matters it that her skin was not without the rich quality of cream too thick to pour, when her arms fairly dimpled and billowed of this creaminess, and above her rather small ankles her made-to-order red-satin shoes bulged over of it, the low-cut bosom of her red and sequin dress was a terrific expanse of it, her hands small cushions of it, her throat quivery, and her walk a waddle with it. All but her face; it was as if the suet-like inundation of the flesh had not dared here. The chin was only slightly doubled; the cheeks just a shade too plump. Neither was the eye heavy of lid or sunk down behind a ridge of cheek. Between her eyes and upper lip, Miss Hoag looked her just-turned twenty; beyond them, she was antediluvian, deluged, smothered beneath the creamy billows and billows of self.

And yet, sunk there like a flower-seed planted too deeply to push its way up to bloom, the twenty-year-old heart of Miss Hoag beat beneath its carbonaceous layer upon layer, even skipped a beat at spring's palpitating sweetness, dared to dream of love, weep of desire, ache of loneliness and loveliness.

Isolated thus by the flesh, the spirit, too, had been

caught in nature's sebaceous trick upon Miss Hoag. Life had passed her by slimly. But Miss Hoag's redundancy was not all literal. A sixth and saving sense of humor lay like a coating of tallow protecting the surface of her. For nature's vagary, she was pensioned on life's pay-roll at eighteen dollars a week.

"Easy money, friends," Miss Hoag would *ad lib.* to the line-up outside her railing; "how would some of you like to sit back and draw your wages just for the color of your hair or the size of your shoes? You there, that sailor boy down there, how'd you like to have a fox-trot with Teenie? Something to tell the Jackies about. Come on, Jack Tar, I'm light on my feet, but I won't guarantee what I'll be on yours. Step up and have a round."

Uusually the crowd would turn sheepish and dissolve at this Terpischorean threat. In fact, it was Miss Hoag's method of accomplishing just that.

In the August high noon of the Coney Island Freak Palace, which is the time and scene of my daring to introduce to you the only under-thirty-years, and over-one-hundred-and-thirty-pounds, heroine in the history of fiction, the megaphone's catch of the day's first dribble of humanity and inhumanity had not yet begun its staring, gaping invasion.

A curtain of heat that was almost tangible hung from the glass roof. The Ossified Man, sworn by clause of contact impervious alike to heat and cold, urged his reclining wheel-chair an imperceptible inch toward the neighboring sway of Miss Hoag's palm-leaf. She widened its arc, subtly.

"Ain't it a fright?" she said.

"Sacred Mother of the Sacred Child!" said the Ossified Man, in a *patois* of very south Italy.

Then Miss Hoag turned to the right, a rail partitioning her from the highly popular spectacle of the Baron de Ross, christened, married, and to be buried by his nomenclature in disuse, Edwin Ross Mac Gregor.

"Hot, honey?"

The Baron, in a toy rocker that easily contained him, turned upon Miss Hoag a face so anachronistic that the senses reeled back. An old face, as if carved out of a paleolithic cherry-stone; the years furrowed in; the eyes as if they had seen, without marveling, the light of creation; even the hands, braceleted in what might have been portière-rings, leanly prehensile. When the Baron spoke, his voice was not unlike the middle C of an old harpsichord whose wires long since had rusted and died. He was frock-coated like a clergyman or a park statue of a patriot.

Of face, a Chaldean sire; of dress, a miniature apotheosis of the tailor's art; of form, a paleolithic child.

"Blow me to a ice-cream cone? Gowann, Teenie, have a heart!"

Miss Hoag billowed into silent laughter. "Little devil! That's six you've sponged off me this week, you little whipper-snapper!"

The Baron screwed up into the tightest of grimaces. "Nice Teenie—nice old Teenie!"

She tossed him a coin from the small saucerful

of them on the table beside her. He caught it with the simian agility of his tiny hands.

"Nice Teenie! Nice old Teenie!"

A first group had strolled up, indolent and insolent at the spectacle of them.

"Photographs! Photographs! Take the folks back home a signed photograph of Teenie—only ten cents, one dime. Give the kiddies a treat—signed photograph of little Teenie!"

She would solicit thus, canorous of phrase, a fan of her cardboard likenesses held out, invitational.

Occasionally there were sales, the coins rattling down into the china saucer beside her; oftener a mere bombardment of insolence and indolence, occasionally a question.

This day from a motorman, loitering in uniform between runs, "Say, skinnay, whatcha weigh?"

Whatever of living tissue may have shrunk and quivered deep beneath the surface of Miss Hoag was further insulated by a certain professional pride —that of the champion middleweight for his cauliflower ear, of the beauty for the tiny mole where her neck is whitest, the *ballerina* for her double joints.

"Wanna come up and dance with me and find out?"

"O Lord!"—receding from the crowd and its trail of laughter. "O Lord! Excuse me. Good night!"

A CHILD: Missus, is all of you just one lady?

"Bless your heart, little pettie, they gimme a good measure, didn't they? Here's a chocolate drop for the little pettie."

"Come away! Don't take nothing from her!"

"I wouldn't hurt your little girl, lady. I wouldn't harm a pretty hair of her head; I love the kiddies."

"Good-by, missus."

"Good-by, little pettie."

A MAN: Say, was you born in captivity—in this line o' work, I mean?

"Law, no, friend! I never seen the light of the show business up to eight year ago. There wasn't a member of my family, all dead and put away now, weighed more 'n one-fifty. They say it of my mother, she was married at ninety pounds and died at a hundred and six."

"You don't say so."

"I was born and raised on a farm out in Ohio. Bet not far from your part of the country, from the looks of you, friend. Buckeye?"

"Not a bad guess at that—Indiana's mine."

"Law! to my way of thinking, there's no part of the Union got anything on the Middle States. Knock me around all you want, I always say, but let me be buried in the Buckeye State. Photographs? Signed photographs at ten cents each. Take one home to the wife, friend, out in Indiana. Come, friends, what's a dime? Ten cents!"

The crowd, treacle-slow, and swinging its children shoulder-high, would shuffle on, pause next at the falsetto exhortations of the Baron, then on to the collapsibilities of the Boneless Wonder, the flexuosities of the Snake-charmer, the goose-fleshing, the terrible crunching of Jastrow the Granite Jaw. A commotion, this last, not unlike the steam-roller leveling of a rock road.

Miss Hoag retired then back to her chair, readjusting the photographs to their table display, wielding her fan largely.

"Lord!" she said, across the right railing, "wouldn't this weather fry you!"

The Baron wilted to a mock swoon, his little legs stiffening at a hypotenuse.

"Ice-cream cone!" he cried. "Ice-cream cone, or I faint!"

"Poor Jastrow! Just listen to him! Honest, that grinding goes right through me. He hadn't ought to be showing to-day, after the way they had to have the doctor in on him last night. He hadn't ought to be eating that nasty glass."

"Ain't it awful, Mabel!"

"Yes, it's awful, Mabel! A fellow snagging up his insides like Jastrow. I never knew a glass-eating artist in my life that lived to old age. I was showing once with a pair of glass-eating sisters, the Twins Delamar, as fine a pair of girls as ever—"

"Sure, the Delamars—I know 'em."

"Remember the specialty they carried, stepping on a piece of plate glass and feeding each other with the grounds—"

"Sure."

"Well, I sat up for three weeks running, with one of them girls—the red-haired one, till she died off of sorosis of the liver—"

"Sure enough—Lizzie Delamar!"

"Lida, the other one, is still carrying the act on street-fair time, but it won't surprise me to hear of

her next. That's what 'll happen to Granite Jaw one of these days, too, if he—"

"Pretty soft on the Granite Jaw, ain't cha? M-m-n! Yum-yum! Pretty soft!" When the Baron mouthed he became in expression Punchinello with his finger alongside his nose, his face tightening and knotting into cunning. "Pretty soft on the Granite Jaw! Yum—yum—yum!"

"Little devil! Little devil! I'll catch you and spank you to death."

"Yum! Yum!

"It's better to have loved a short man
Than never to have loved atall."

"Little peewee, you! Jastrow ain't short. Them thick, strong-necked kind never look their height. That boy is five feet two, if he's an inch. Them stocky ones is the build that make the strong kind. Looka him lift up that cannon-ball with just his left hand. B-r-r-r-r! Listen how it shakes the place when he lets its fall! Looka! Honest, it makes me sick! It's a wonder he don't kill himself.

"Better to have loved a short man
Than never to have loved atall."

The day, sun-riddled, stare-riddled, sawdusty, and white with glare, slouched into the clanging, banging, electric-pianoed, electrifying Babylonia of a Coney Island Saturday night. The erupting lava of a pent-up work-a-week, odoriferous of strong foods and wilted clothing, poured hotly down that boulevard of the bourgeoise, Ocean Avenue. The slow, thick cir-

culation of six days of pants-pressing and boiler-making, of cigarette-rolling and typewriting, of machine-operating and truck-driving, of third-floor-backs, congestion and indigestion, of depression and suppression, demanding the spurious kind of excitation that can whip the blood to foam. The terrific gyration of looping the loop. The comet-tail plunge of shooting the chutes; the rocketing skyward, and the delicious madness at the pit of the stomach on the downward swoop. The bead on the apple juice, the dash of mustard to the frankfurter, the feather tickler in the eye, the barker to the ear, and the thick festival-flavored sawdust to the throat. By eleven o'clock the Freak Palace was a gelatinous congestion of the quickened of heart, of blood, of tongue, and of purse. The crowd stared, gaped, squirmed through itself, sweated.

By twelve o'clock, from her benchlike throne that had become a straitjacket to the back, a heaviness had set in that seemed to thicken Miss Hoag's eyelids, the flush receding before doughiness.

A weary mountain of the cruelly enhancing red silk and melting sequin paste, the billowy arms inundated with the thumb-deep dimples lax out along the chair-sides, as preponderous and preposterous a heroine as ever fell the lot of scribe, she was nature's huge joke—a practical joke, too, at eighteen dollars a week, bank-books from three trust companies, and a china pig about ready to burst.

"Cheer up, Ossi! It might be worse," she said across the left rail, but her lids twitching involuntarily of tiredness.

"Sacred Mother of the Sacred Child!" said the Ossified Man, in Italian.

The sword-swallower, at the megaphone instance of the barker, waggled suddenly into motion, and, flouncing back her bushy knee-skirts and kissing to the four winds, threw back her head and swallowed an eighteen-inch carpenter's saw to the hilt. The crowd flowed up and around her.

Miss Hoag felt on the undershelf of her table for a glass of water, draining it. "Thank God," she said, "another day done!" and began getting together her photographs into a neat packet, tilting the contents of the saucer into a small biscuit-tin and snapping it around with a rubber band.

The Baron de Ross was counting, too, his small hands eager at the task. "This Island is getting as hard-boiled as an egg," he said.

"It is that," said Miss Hoag, making a pencil insert into a small memorandum-book.

"You!" cried the Baron, the screw lines out again. "You money-bag tied in the middle! I know a tattooed girl worked with you once on the St. Louis World's Fair Pike says you slept on a pillow stuffed with greenbacks."

"You're crazy with the heat," said Miss Hoag. "What I've got out of this business, I've sweated for."

Then the Baron de Ross executed a pirouette of tiny self. "Worth your weight in gold! Worth your weight in gold!"

"If you don't behave yourself, you little pee-wee, I'll leave you to plow home through the sand

alone. If it wasn't for me playing nurse-girl to you, you'd have to be hiring a keeper. You better behave."

"Worth your weight in gold! Blow us to a ice-cream cone. Eh, Ossi?"

The crowd had sifted out; all but one of the center aisle of grill arc-lights flickered out, leaving the Freak Palace to a spluttering kind of gloom. The Snake-charmer, of a thousand iridescencies, wound the last of her devitalized cobras down into its painted chest. The Siamese Twins untwisted out of their embrace and went each his way. The Princess Albino wove her cotton hair into a plait, finishing it with a rapidly wound bit of thread. An attendant trundled the Ossified Man through a rear door. Jastrow the Granite Jaw flopped on his derby, slightly askew, and strolled over toward that same door, hands in pocket. He was thewed like an ox. Short and as squattily packed down as a Buddha, the great sinews of his strength bulged in his short neck and in the backs of the calves of his legs, even rippled beneath his coat. It was as if a compress had reduced him from great height down to his tightest compactness, concentrating the strength of him. Even in repose, the undershot jaw was plunged forward, the jowls bonily defined.

"Worth her weight in gold! Blow us to a ice-cream cone. Eh, Jastrow? She's worth her weight in gold."

Passing within reach of where the Baron de Ross danced to his ditty of reiteration, Jastrow the Granite Jaw reached up and in through the rail, capturing

one of the jiggling ankles, elevating the figure of the Baron de Ross to a high-flung torch.

"Lay off that noise," said Jastrow the Granite Jaw, threatening to dangle him head downward. "Lay off, or I'll drown you like a kitten!"

With an agility that could have swung him from bough to bough, the Baron de Ross somersaulted astride the rear of Jastrow the Granite Jaw's great neck, pounding little futile fists against the bulwark of head.

"Leggo me! Leggo!"

"Gr-r-r-r! I'll step on you and squash you like a caterpillar."

"Don't hurt him, Mr. Jastrow! Don't let him fall off backwards. He is so little. Teenie 'll catch you if you fall, honey. Teenie's here in back of you."

With another double twist, the Baron de Ross somersaulted backward off the shoulder of his captor, landing upright in the outstretched skirts of Miss Hoag.

"Yah, yah!" he cried, dancing in the net of skirt and waggling his hands from his ears. "Yah, yah!"

The Granite Jaw smoothed down the outraged rear of his head, eyes rolling and smile terrible

"Wow!" he said, making a false feint toward him.

The Baron, shrill with hysteria, plunged into a fold of Miss Hoag's skirt.

"Don't hurt him, Jastrow. He's so awful little! Don't play rough."

THE BARON (*projecting his face around a fold of skirt*): Worth her weight in go-uld—go-uld!

"He's always guying me for my saving ways, Jastrow. I tell him I 'ain't got no little twenty-eight-inch wife out in San Francisco sending me pin-money. Neither am I the prize little grafter of the world. I tell him he's the littlest man and the biggest grafter in this show. Come out of there, you little devil! He thinks because I got a few hundred dollars laid by I'm a bigger freak than the one I get paid for being."

Jastrow the Granite Jaw flung the crook of his walking-stick against his hip, leaning into it, the flanges of his nostrils widening a bit, as if scenting.

"You old mountain-top," he said, screwing at the up-curving mustache, "who'd have thought you had that pretty a penny saved?"

"I don't look to see myself live and die in the show business, Mr. Jastrow."

"Now you said something, Big Tent."

"There's a farm out near Xenia, Ohio, where I lay up in winter, that I'm going to own for myself one of these days. I've seen too many in this business die right in exhibition, and the show have to chip in to bury 'em, for me not to save up against a rainy day."

"Lay it on, Big Tent. I like your philosophy."

"That's me every time, Mr. Jastrow. I'm going to die in a little story-and-a-half frame house of my own with a cute little pointy roof, a potato-patch right up to my back steps, and my own white Leghorns crossin' my own country road to get to the other side. Why, I know a Fat in this business, Aggie Lamont—"

"Sure, me and the Baroness played Mexico City Carnival with Aggie Lamont. Some heavy!"

"Well, that girl, in her day, was one of the biggest tips to the scale this business ever seen. What happens? All of a sudden, just like that—pneumonia! Gets up out of bed, eight weeks later, skin and bones—down to three hundred and sixty-five pounds and not a penny saved. I chipped in what I could to keep her going, but she just down and died one night. Job gone. No weight. In the exhibit business, just like any other line, you got to have a long head. A Fat's got to look ahead for a thin day. Strong for a weak day. That's why I wish, Mr. Jastrow, you'd cut out that glass-eating feature of yours."

"How much you got, Airy-Fairy? Lemme double your money for you!"

"She's worth her weight in gold."

"Lemme double it!"

"Like fun I will. A spendthrift like you!"

"Which way you going?"

"We always go home by the beach. Shapiro made it a rule that the Bigs and Littles can't ever show themselves on Ocean Avenue."

"Come on, you little flea; I'll ride you up the beach on my shoulder."

"Oh, Mr. Jastrow, you—you going to walk home with me—and—Baron?"

"Come on was what I said."

He mounted the Baron de Ross to his bulge of shoulder with veriest toss, Miss Hoag, in a multifold cape that was a merciful shroud to the bulk of her, descending from the platform. The place had

emptied itself of its fantastic congress of nature's pranks, only the grotesque print of it remaining. The painted snake-chests closed. The array of gustatory swords, each in flannelet slip-cover. The wild man's cage, empty. The tiny velocipede of the Baron de Ross, upside down against rust. A hall of wonder here. A cave of distorted fancy. The Land of the Cow Jumped over the Moon and the Dish Ran away with the Spoon.

Outside, a moon, something bridal in its whiteness, beat down upon a kicked-up stretch of beach, the banana-skins, the pop-corn boxes, the gambados of erstwhile revelers violently printed into its sands. A platinum-colored sea undulated in.

The leaping, bounding outline of Luna Park winked out even as they emerged, the whole violent contortion fading back into silver mist. There was a new breeze, spicily cool.

Miss Hoag breathed out, "Ain't this something grand?"

"Giddy-ap!" cried the Baron, slappity-slappity at the great boulder of the Granite Jaw's head. "Giddy-ap!"

They plowed forward, a group out of Phantasmagoria—as motley a threesome as ever strode this side of the Land of Anesthesia.

"How do you like it at Mrs. Bostum's boarding-house, Mr. Jastrow? I never stop anywheres else on the Island. Most of the Shapiro concession always stops there."

"Good as the next," said Mr. Jastrow, kicking onward.

"I was sorry to hear you was ailing so last night, Mr. Jastrow, and I was sorry there was nothing you would let me do for you. They always call me 'the Doc' around exhibits. I say—but you just ought to heard yourself yell me out of the room when I come in to offer myself—"

"They had me crazy with pain."

"You wasn't so crazy with pain when the albino girl come down with the bottle of fire-water, was he, Baron? We seen him throwing goo-goos at Albino, didn't we, Baron?"

THE BARON (*impish in the moonlight*): He fell for a cotton-top.

"He didn't yell the albino and her bottle out, did he, Baron?"

"It's this darn business," said Mr. Jastrow, creating a storm of sand-spray with each stride. "I'm punctured up like a tire."

"I been saying to the Baron, Mr. Jastrow, if you'd only cut out the glass-eating feature. You got as fine a appearance and as fine a strong act by itself as you could want. A short fellow like you with all your muscle-power is a novelty in himself. Honest, Mr. Jastrow, it—it's a sin to see a fine-set-up fellow like you killing yourself this way. You ought to cut out the granite-jaw feature."

"Yeh—and cut down my act to half-pay. I'd be full of them tricks—wouldn't I? Show me another jaw act measures up to mine. Show me the strong-arm number that ever pulled down the coin a jaw act did. I'd be a sweet boob, wouldn't I, to cut my pocket-book in two? I need money, Airy-Fairy.

My God! how I got the capacity for needing money!"

"What's money to health, Mr. Jastrow? It ain't human or freak nature to digest glass. Honest, every time I hear you crunching I get the chills!"

Then Mr. Jastrow shot forward his lower jaw with a milling motion:

"Gr-r-r-r-r!"

"She's sweet on you, Jastrow, like all the rest of 'em.

"Better to have loved a short man
Than never to have loved atall."

"Baron, I—I'll spank!"

"Worth her weight in gold!"

"Where you got all that money soaked, Big Tent?"

"Aw, Mr. Jastrow, the Baron's only tormenting me."

"She sleeps on a pillow stuffed with greenbacks."

"Sure I got a few dollars saved, and I ain't ashamed of it. I've had steady work in this business eight years, now, ever since the circus came to my town out in Ohio and made me the offer, but that's no sign I can be in it eight years longer. Sure I got a few dollars saved."

"Well, whatta you know—a big tent like you?"

"Ain't a big tent like me human, Mr. Jastrow? Ain't I—ain't I just like any other—girl—twenty years old—ain't I just like—other—girls—underneath all this?"

"Sure, sure!" said Mr. Jastrow. "How much you to the good, little one?"

"I've about eleven hundred dollars with my bank-books and pig."

"'Leven hundred! Well, whatta you know about that? Say, Big Tent, better lemme double your money for you!"

"Aw, you go on, Mr. Jastrow! Ain't you the torment, too?"

"Say, gal, next time I get the misery you can hold my hand as long as your little heart desires. 'Leven hundred to the good! Good night! Get down off my shoulder, you little flea, you. I got to turn in here and take a drink on the strength of that! 'Leven hundred to the good! Good night!"

"Oh, Mr. Jastrow, in your state! In your state alcohol's poison. Mr. Jastrow — please — you mustn't!"

"Blow me, too, Jas! Aw, say—have a heart; blow me to a bracer, too!"

"No, no, Mr. Jastrow, don't take the Baron. The little fellow can't stand alcohol. His baroness don't want it. Anyways, it's against the rules—please—"

"You stay and take the lady home, flea. See the lady home like a gentleman. 'Leven hundred to the good! Say, I'd see a lady as far as the devil on that. Good night!"

At Mrs. Bostum's boarding-house, one of a row of the stare-faced packing-cases of the summer city, bathing-suits drying and kicking over veranda rails, a late quiet had fallen, only one window showing yellowly in the peak of its top story. A white-net screen door was unhooked from without by inserting

a hand through a slit in the fabric. An uncarpeted pocket of hall lay deep in absolute blackness. Miss Hoag fumbled for the switch, finally leaving the Baron to the meager comfort of his first-floor back.

"Y'all right, honey? Can you reach what you want?"

The Baron clambered to a chair and up to her. His face had unknotted, the turmoil of little lines scattering.

"Aw!" he said. "Good old tub, Teenie! Good old Big Tent!"

A layer of tears sprang across Miss Hoag's glance and, suddenly gaining rush, ran down over her lashes. She dashed at them.

"I'm human, Baron. Maybe you don't know it, but I'm human."

"Now what did I do, Teenie?"

"It—it ain't you, Baron; it—it ain't anybody. It—it's—only I just wonder sometimes what God had in mind, anyways—making our kind. Where do we belong—"

"Aw, you're a great Heavy, Teenie—and it's the Bigs and the Littles got the cinch in this business. Looka the poor Siamese. How'd you like to be hitched up thataway all day. Looka Ossi. How'd you like to let 'em stick pins in you all for their ten cents' worth. Looka poor old Jas. Why, a girl's a fool to waste any heartache gettin' stuck on him. That old boy's going to wake up out of one of them spells dead some day. How'd you like to chew glass because it's big money and then drink it up so fast

you'd got to borrow money off the albino girl for the doctor's prescription—"

The tears came now rivuleting down Miss Hoag's cheeks, bouncing off to the cape.

"O God!" she said, her hand closing over the Baron's, pressing it. "With us freaks, even if we win, we lose. Take me. What's the good of ten million dollars to me—twenty millions? Last night when I went in to offer him help—him in the same business and that ought to be used to me—right in the middle of being crazy with pain, what did he yell every time he looked at me, 'Take her away! Take her away!'"

"Aw now, Teenie, Jas had the D. T.'s last night; he—"

"'Take her away!' he kept yelling. 'Take her away!' One of my own kind getting the horrors just to look at me!"

"You're sweet on the Granite Jaw; you are, Teenie; that's what's eating you—you're sweet on the Granite Jaw—"

Suddenly Miss Hoag turned, slamming the door afterward so that the silence re-echoed sharply.

"What if I am?" she said, standing out in the hall pocket of absolute blackness, her hand cupped against her mouth and the blinding tears staggering. "What if I am? What if I am?"

Within her own room, a second-floor-back, augmented slightly by an immaculate layout of pink-celluloid toilet articles and a white water-pitcher of three pink carnations, Miss Hoag snapped on her light where it dangled above the celluloid toilet articles.

A summer-bug was bumbling against the ceiling; it dashed itself between Miss Hoag and her mirror, as she stood there breathing from the climb and looking back at herself with salt-bitten eyes, mouth twitching. Finally, after an inanimate period of unseeing stare, she unhooked the long cape, brushing it, and, ever dainty of self, folding it across a chair-back. A voluminous garment, fold and fold upon itself, but sheer and crisp dimity, even streaming a length of pink ribbon, lay across the bed-edge. Miss Hoag took it up, her hand already slowly and tiredly at the business of unfettering herself of the monstrous red silk.

Came a sudden avalanche of knocking and a rattling of door-knob, the voice of Mrs. Bostrum, landlady, high with panic.

"Teenie! Jastrow's dyin' in his room! He's yellin' for you! For God's sakes—quick—down in his room!"

In the instant that followed, across the sudden black that blocked Miss Hoag of vision, there swam a million stars.

"Teenie! For God's sakes—quick! He's yellin' for you—"

"Coming, Mrs. Bostrum—coming—coming—coming!"

In a dawn that came up as pink as the palm of a babe, but flowed rather futilely against the tired, speckled eye of incandescent bulb dangling above the Granite Jaw's rumpled, tumbled bed of pain, a gray-looking group stood in whispered conference

beside a slit of window that overlooked a narrow clapboard slit of street.

THE DOCTOR: Even with recovery, he will be on his back at least six months.

MISS HOAG: Oh, my God! Doctor!

THE DOCTOR: Has the man means?

THE BARON: Not a penny. He only came to the concession two months ago from a row with the Flying-Fish Troupe. He's in debt already to half the exhibit.

THE LANDLADY: He's two weeks in arrears. Not that I'm pestering the poor devil now, but Gawd knows I—need—

THE DOCTOR: Any relatives or friends to consult about the operation?

MISS HOAG (*turning and stooping*): 'Ain't you got no relations or friends, Jastrow? What was it you hollered about the aerial-wonder act? Are they friends of yours? 'Ain't you got no relatives, no —no friends, maybe, that you could stay with awhile? Sid? Who's he? 'Ain't you, Jastrow, got no relations?

The figure under the sheet, pain-huddled, limb-twisted, turned toward the wall, palm slapping out against it.

"Hell!" said Jastrow, the Granite Jaw.

THE DOCTOR (*drawing down his shirt-sleeves*): I'll have an ambulance around in twenty minutes.

MISS HOAG: Where for, Doctor?

THE DOCTOR: Brooklyn Public Institute, for the present.

THE LANDLADY (*apron up over her head*): Poor fellow! Poor handsome fellow!

MISS HOAG: No, Doctor. No! No! No!

THE DOCTOR (*rather tiredly*): Sorry, madam, but there is no alternative.

MISS HOAG: No, no! I'll pay, Doctor. How much? How much?

THE BARON: Yeh. I'll throw in a tenner myself. Don't throw the poor devil to charity. We'll collect from the troupe. We raised forty dollars for a nigger wild man, once when—

THE DOCTOR: Come now; all this is not a drop in the bucket. This man needs an operation and then constant attention. If he pulls through, it is a question of months. What he actually needs then is country air, fresh milk, eggs, professional nursing, and plenty of it!

MISS HOAG: That's me, Doc! That's me! I'm going to fix just that for him. I got the means. I can show you three bank-books. I got the means and a place out in Ohio I can rent 'til I buy it some day. A farm! Fresh milk! Leghorns! I'll take him out there, Doc. Eighty miles from where I was born. I was thinking of laying up awhile, anyways. I got the means. I'll pull him through, Doctor. I'll pull him through!

THE BARON: Good God! Teenie—you crazy—

FROM THE BED: Worth her weight in gold. Worth her weight in gold.

In the cup of a spring dusk that was filled to overflowing with an ineffable sweetness and the rich,

loamy odors of turned earth; with rising sap and low mists; with blackening tree-tops and the chittering of birds—the first lamplight of all the broad and fertile landscape moved across the window of a story-and-a-half white house which might have been either itself or its own outlying barn. A roof, sheer of slant, dipped down over the window, giving the façade the expression of a coolie under peaked hat.

"Great Scott! Move that lamp off the sill! You want to gimme the blind staggers?"

"I didn't know it was in your eyes, honey. There —that better?"

Silence.

A parlor hastily improvised into a bedroom came out softly in the glow. A room of matting and marble-topped, bottle-littered walnut table, of white iron hospital-cot and curly horsehair divan, a dapple-marble mantelpiece of conch-shell, medicated gauze, bisque figurines, and hot-water kettle; in the sheerest of dimity, still dainty of ribbon, the figure of Miss Hoag, hugely, omnipotently omnipresent.

"That better, Jas?" Silence. "Better? That's good! Now for the boy's supper. Beautiful white egg laid by beautiful white hen and all beat up fluffy with sugar to make boy well, eh?"

Emaciated to boniness, the great frame jutting and straining rather terribly to break through the restraint of too tight flesh, Mr. Jastrow rose to his elbow, jaw-lines sullen.

"Cut out that baby talk and get me a swig, Teenie. Get me a drink before I get ugly."

"Oh, Jastrow honey, don't begin that. Please,

Jastrow, don't begin that. You been so good all day, honey—"

"Get me a swig," he repeated through set teeth. "You and a boob country quack of a doctor ain't going to own my soul. I'll bust up the place again. I ain't all dead yet. Get me a swig—quick, too."

"Jas, there ain't none."

"There is!"

"That's just for to whip up five drops at a time with your medicine. That's medicine, Jas; it ain't to be took like drink. You know what the doc said last time. He ain't responsible if you disobey. I ain't—neither. Please, Jas!"

"I know a thing or two about the deal I'm getting around here. No quack boob is going to own my soul."

"Ain't it enough the way you nearly died last time, Jas? Honest, didn't that teach you a lesson? Be good, Jas. Don't scare poor old Teenie all alone here with you. Looka out there through the door. Ain't it something grand? Honest, Jas, I just never get tired looking. See them low little hills out there. I always say they look like chiffon this time of evening. Don't they? Just looka the whole fields out there, so still—like—like a old horse standing up dozing. Smell! Listen to the little birds! Ain't we happy out here, me and my boy that's getting well so fine?"

Then Jastrow the Granite Jaw began to whimper, half-moans engendered by weakness. "Put me out of my misery. Shoot!"

"Jas—Jas—ain't that just an awful way for you

to talk? Ain't that just terrible to say to your poor old Big Tent?"

She smoothed out his pillow, and drew out his cot on ready casters, closer toward the open door.

"See, Jas—honest, can you ever get enough of how beautiful it is? When I was a kid on my pap's farm out there, eighty miles beyond the ridge, instead of playing with the kids that used to torment me because I was a heavy, I just used to lay out evenings like this on a hay-rack or something and look and look and look. There's something about this soft kind of scenery that a person that's born in it never gets tired of. Why, I've exhibited out in California right under the nose of the highest kind of mountains; but gimme the little scenery every time."

"I'm a lump—that's what I am. Nine months of laying. I'm a lump—on a woman, too."

"Why, Jas, Teenie's proud to have you on—on her. 'Ain't we got plans for each other after—you get well? Why, half the time I'm just in heaven over that. That's why, honey, if only you won't let yourself get setbacks! That's all the doctor says is between you and getting well. That's all that keeps you down, Jas, you scaring me and making me go against the doctor's orders. Last week your eating that steak—that drink you stole—ain't you ashamed to have got out of bed that way and broke the lock? You—you mustn't ever again, Jas, make me go against the doctor."

"I gets crazy. Crazy with laying."

"Just think, Jas; here I've drew out my last six

hundred, ready to make first payment down on the place and us all ready to begin to farm it. Ain't that worth holding yourself in for? It wouldn't be right, Jas; it would be something terrible if we had to break into that six hundred for medicine and doctors. I don't know what to make of you, honey, all those months so quiet and behaved on your back, and, now that you're getting well, the—the old liquor-thirst setting in. We never will get our start that way, Jas. We got plans, if you don't hinder your poor Teenie. The doctor told me, honey—honest, he did—one of them spells—from liquor could—could take you off just like that. Even getting well the way you are!"

"I'm a lump; that's what I am."

"You ain't, Jas; you're just everything in the world."

"Sponging off a woman!"

"'Sponging'! With our own little farm and us farming it to pay it off! I like that!"

"Gimme a swig, Teenie. For God's sake gimme a swig!"

"Jas—Jas, if you get to cutting up again, I'm go-oing to get me a man-nurse out here—honest I am!"

"A swig, Teenie."

"Please, Jas—it's only for bad spells—five drops mixed up in your medicine. That's six dollars a bottle, Jas, and only for bad spells."

"Stingy gut!"

"Looka down there, honey — there's old man Wyncoop's cow broke tether again. What you bet he's out looking for her. See her winding up the road."

"Stingy gut!"

"You know I ain't stingy. If the doctor didn't forbid, I'd buy you ten bottles, I would, if it cost twenty a bottle. I'm trying to do what the doctor says is best, Jas."

"'Best'! I know what's best. A few dollars in my pocket for me to boss over and buy me the things I need is what's best. I'm a man born to having money in his pocket. I'm none of your mollycoddles."

"Sure you ain't! Haven't you got over ninety dollars under your pillow this minute? 'Ain't the boy got all the spending-money he wants and nowheres to spend it? Ain't that a good one, Jas? All the spending-money he wants and nowheres to spend it. Next thing the boy knows, he's going to be working the farm and sticky with money. Ain't it wonderful, Jas, never no showing for us again? O God! ain't that just wonderful?"

He reached up then to stroke her hand, a short pincushion of a hand, white enough, but amazingly inundated with dimples.

"Nice old Big Tent!"

"That's the way, honey! Honest, when you get one of your nice spells, your poor old Teenie would do just anything for you."

"I get crazy with pain. It makes me ugly."

"I know, Jas—I know—anyway, you fix it, honey. I 'ain't got a kick coming—a—tub like me to have —you."

She loomed behind his cot, carefully out of his range of vision, her own gaze out across the drowsing

countryside. A veil of haze was beginning to thicken, whole schools of crickets whirring into it.

"If—if not for one thing, Jas, you know—you know what? I think if a person was any happier than me, she—she'd die."

"Let's play I'm Rockefeller laying on his country estate, Teenie. Come on; let's kid ourselves along. Gimme the six hundred, Teenie—"

"Why don't you ask me, Jas, except for what I'd be the happiest girl? Well, it's this. If only I could wear a cloak so when I got in it you couldn't see me! If only I never had to walk in front of you so —so you got to look at me!"

"You been a good gal to me, Big Tent. I never even look twice at you—that's how used a fellow can get to anything. I'm going to square it up with you, too."

"You mean it's me will square it with you, Jas —you see if I don't. Why, there'll be nothing too much for me to do to make up for the happiness we're going to have, Jas. I'm going to make this the kinda little home you read about in the magazines. Tear out all this old rented junk furniture, paint it up white after we got the six hundred paid down and the money beginning to come in. I'm even going to fix up the little trap-door room in the attic, so that if the Baron or any of the old exhibit crowd happens to be showing in Xenia or around, they can visit us. Just think, Jas—a spare room for the old crowd. Honest, it's funny, but there's not one thing scares me about all these months on the place alone here, Jas, now that we bought the

gun, except the nightmares sometimes that we—we're back exhibiting. That's why I want to keep open house for them that ain't as lucky as us. Honest, Jas—I—I just can't think it's real, not, anyways, till we've paid down six hundred and—the fellow you keep joking about that wears his collar wrong side 'fore comes out from Xenia to read the ceremony. Oh, Jas, I—I'll make it square with you.* You'll never have a sorry day for it!"

"You're all right, Big Tent," said the Granite Jaw, lying back suddenly, lips twitching.

"Ain't you feeling well, honey? Let me fix you an egg?"

"A little swig, Teenie—a little one, is all I ask."

"No, no—please, Jastrow; don't begin—just as I had you forgetting."

"It does me good, I tell you. I know my constitution better than a quack country boob does. I'm a freak, I am—a prize concession that has to be treated special. Since that last swig, I tell you, I been a different man. I need the strength. I got to have a little in my system. I'm a freak, I tell you. Everybody knows there's nothing like a swig for strength."

"Not for you! It's poison, Jas, so much poison! Don't you remember what they said to you after the operation? All your life you got to watch out—just the little prescribed for you is all your system has got to have. Wouldn't I give it to you otherwise—wouldn't I?"

"Swig, Teenie! Honest to God, just a swig!"

"No, no, Jas! No, no, no!"

Suddenly Jastrow the Granite Jaw drew down his lips to a snarl, his hands clutching into the coverlet and drawing it up off his feet.

"Gimme!" he said. "I've done it before and I'll do it now—smash up the place! Gimme! You're getting me crazy! This time you got me crazy. Gimme—you hear—gimme!"

"Jas—for God's sakes—no—no!"

"Gimme! By God! you hear—gimme!" There was a wrenching movement of his body, a fumbling beneath the pillow, and Mr. Jastrow suddenly held forth, in crouched attitude of cunning, something cold, something glittering, something steel.

"Now," he said, head jutting forward, and through shut teeth—"now gimme, or by God—"

"Jas—Jas—for God's sake have you gone crazy? Where'd you get that gun? Is that where I heard you sneaking this morning—over to my trunk for my watch-dog? Gimme that gun—Jas! You—you're crazy—Jas!"

"You gimme, was what I said, and gimme quick! You see this thing pointing? Well, gimme quick."

"Jas—"

"Don't 'Jas' me. I'm ugly this time, and when I'm ugly *I'm ugly!*"

"All right! All right! Only, for God's sakes, Jas, don't get out of bed, don't get crazy enough to shoot that thing. I'll get it. Wait, Jastrow; it's all right, you're all right. I'll get it. See, Teenie's going. Wait—wait—Teenie's going—"

She edged out and she edged in, hysteria audible in her breathing.

"Jas honey, won't you please—"

"Gimme, was what I said—gimme and quick!"

Her arm under his head, the glass tilted high against his teeth, he drank deeply, gratefully, breathing out finally and lying back against his pillow, his right hand uncurling of its clutch.

She lifted the short-snouted, wide-barreled, and steely object off the bed-edge gingerly, tremblingly.

"More like it," he said, running his tongue around his mouth; "more like it."

"Jas—Jas, what have you done?"

"Great stuff! Great stuff!" He kept repeating.

"If—if you wasn't so sick, honey—I don't know what I'd do after such a terrible thing like this—you acting like this—so terrible—God! I—I'm all trembling."

"Great stuff!" he said, and reaching out and eyes still closed, patting her. "Great stuff, nice old Big Tent!"

"Try to sleep now, Jas. You musta had a spell of craziness! This is awful! Try to sleep. If only you don't get a spell— Sleep—please!"

"You wait! Guy with the collar on wrong side round—he's the one; he's the one!"

"Yes—yes, honey. Try to sleep!"

"I wanna dream I'm Rockefeller. If there's one thing I want to dream, it's Rockefeller."

"Not now—not now—"

"Lemme go to sleep like a king."

"Yes, honey."

"Like a king," I said.

She slid her hand finally into one of the voluminous

folds of her dress, withdrawing and placing a rubber-bound roll into his hands.

"There, honey. Go to sleep now—like a king."

He fingered it, finally sitting up to count, leaning forward to the ring of lamplight.

"Six hundred bucks! Six hundred! Wow—oh, wow! If Sid could only see me now!"

"He can, honey—he can. Go to sleep. 'Sh-h-h-h!"

"Slide 'em under—slide 'em under—Rockefeller."

She lifted his head, placing the small wad beneath. He turned over, cupping his hand in his cheek, breathing outward deeply, very deeply.

"Jas!"

"Huh?"

"Ain't you all right? You're breathing so hard. Quit breathing so hard. It scares me. Quit making those funny noises. Honey—for God's sake—quit!"

Jastrow the Granite Jaw did quit, so suddenly, so completely, his face turned outward toward the purpling meadows, and his mouth slightly open, that a mirror held finally and frantically against it did not so much as cloud.

At nine o'clock there drew up outside the coolie-faced house one of those small tin motor-cars which are tiny mile-scavengers to the country road. With a thridding of engine and a play of lamps which turned green landscape, gray, it drew up short, a rattling at the screen door following almost immediately.

"Doctor, that you? O my God! Doctor, it's too late! It's all over, Doctor—Doctor—it's all over!" Trembling in a frenzy of haste, Miss Hoag

drew back the door, the room behind her flickering with shadows from an uneven wick.

"You're the Fat, ain't you? The one that's keeping him?"

"What—what—"

"So you're the meal-ticket! Say, leave it to Will. Leave it to that boy not to get lost in this world. Ain't it like him to the T to pick a good-natured Fat?"

There entered into Miss Hoag's front room Miss Sidonia Sabrina, of the Flying-Fish Troupe, World's Aeronaut Trapeze Wonder, gloved and ringleted, beaded of eyelash and pink of ear-lobe, the teeth somewhat crookedly, but pearlily white because the lips were so red, the parasol long and impudently parrot-handled, gilt mesh bag clanking against a cluster of sister baubles.

"If it ain't Will to the T! Pickin' hisself a Fat to sponge on. Can you beat it? M-m! Was you the Fat in the Coney concession?"

"Who— Whatta you—want?"

"We was playin' the Zadalia County Fair. I heard he was on his back. The Little in our show, Baroness de Ross, has a husband played Coney with youse. Where is he? Tell him his little Sid is here. Was his little Sid fool enough to beat it all the way over here in a flivver for eight bucks the round trip? She was! Where is he?"

"He— Who— You—"

"You're one of them good-natured simps, ain't you? So was I, dearie. It don't pay! I always said of Will he could bleed a sour pickle. Where is

he? Tell him his little Sid is here with thirty minutes before she meets up with the show on the ten-forty, when it shoots through Xenia. Tell him she was fool enough to come because he's flat on his back."

"I— That's him—Jastrow—there— O my God —that's him laying there, miss! Who are you? Sid— I thought— I never knew— Who are you? I thought it was Doc. He went off in a flash. I was standing right here— I— O God!"

There seemed to come suddenly over the sibilant Miss Sidonia Sabrina a quieting down, a lessening of twinkle and shimmer and swish. She moved slowly toward the huddle on the cot, parasol leading, and her hands crossed atop the parrot.

"My God!" she said. "Will dead! Will dead! I musta had a hunch. God! I musta! All of a sudden I makes up my mind. I jumps ahead of the show. God! I musta had one of my hunches. That lookin'-glass I broke in Dayton. I—I musta!"

"It come so sudden, miss. It's a wonder I didn't die, too, right on the spot. I was standing here and—"

Suddenly, Miss Sabrina fumbled in the gilt mesh bag for her kerchief, her face lifting to cry.

"He spun me dirt, Will did. If ever a girl was spun dirt, that girl was me, but just the same it —it's my husband laying there—it's my husband, no matter what dirt he spun me. O God—O—O—"

At half after ten to a powdering of eye-sockets, a touching up with lip-stick, a readjustment of three-tiered hat, Miss Sidonia Sabrina took leave. There

were still streaks showing through her retouched cheeks.

"I left you the collar-and-cuff box with his initials on, dearie, for a remembrance. I give it to him the first Christmas after we was married, before he got to developing rough. I been through his things now entire. I got 'em all with me. If there's such a thing as a recordin' angel, you'll go down on the book. Will was a bad lot, but he's done with it now, dearie. I never seen the roughness crop up in a man so sudden the way it did in Will. You can imagine, dearie, when the men in the troupe horsewhipped him one night for the way he lit in on me one night in drink. That was the night he quit. O Gawd! maybe I don't look it, dearie, but I been through the mill in my day. But that's all over now, him layin' there—my husband. Will was a good Strong in his day—nobody can't ever take that away from him. I'm leavin' you the funeral money out of what he had under his pillow. It's a godsend to me my husband layin' up that few hundred when things ain't so good with me. You was a good influence, dearie. I never knew him to save a cent. I'd never have thought it. Not a cent from him all these months. My legs for the air-work ain't what they used to be. Inflammatory rheumatism, y'know. I've got a mind to buy me a farm, too, dearie. Settle down. Say, I got to hand it to you, dearie—you're one fine Fat. Baby Ella herself had nothin' on you, and I've worked with as fine Fats as there is in the business. You're sure one fine Fat, and if there's such a thing as a recordin' angel—I got to

catch that train, dearie—the chauff's honkin'—no grandmother stories goes with my concession. God, to think of Will layin' on a cool six hundred! Here's twenty-five for the funeral. If it's more, lemme know. Sidonia Sabrina, care Flying-Fish Troupe, State Fair, Butler County, Ohio. Good-by, dearie, and God bless you!"

Long after the thridding of engine had died down, and the purple quiet flowed over the path of twin lamplights, Miss Hoag stood in her half-open screen door, gazing after. There were no tears in her eyes; indeed, on the contrary, the echo of the chugg-chugging which still lay on the air had taken on this rhythm:

Better to have loved a short man
Than never to have loved atall.

Better to have loved a short man
Than never to have loved atall.

THE WRONG PEW

FOR six midnights of the week, on the roof of the Moncrieff Frolic, grape-wreathed and with the ecstatic quivering of the flesh that is Asia's, Folly, robed in veils, lifts her carmined lips to be kissed, and Bacchus, whose pot-belly has made him unloved of fair women, raises his perpetual goblet and drinks that he may not weep.

On the stroke of twelve, when on stretches of prairie the invisible joinder of night and day is a majestic thing, the Moncrieff Follies—twenty-four of them, not counting two specialty acts and a pair of whistling Pierrots—burst forth into frolic with a terrific candle and rhinestone power.

Saint Geneviève, who loved so to brood over the enigmatic roofs of the city, would have here found pause. Within the golden inclosure of the Moncrieff Roof, a ceiling canopied in deep waves of burnt-orange velvet cunningly concealed, yet disclosed, amber light, the color of wine in the pouring. Behind burnt-orange portières of great length and great depth of nap, the Twenty-Four Follies, each tempered like a knife edge, stood identically poised for the first clash of Negroid music from a Negroid orchestra.

THE WRONG PEW

At a box-office built to imitate a sedan chair—Louis Quinze without and Louis Slupsky within—Million-Dollar Jimmie Cox, of a hundred hundred Broadway all-nights; the Success Shirt Waist Company, incorporated, entertaining the Keokuk Emporium; the newest husband of the oldest prima donna; and Mr. Herman Loeb, of Kahn, Loeb & Schulien, St. Louis, waited in line for the privilege of ordering *à la carte* from the most *à la mode* menu in Oh-là-là, New York.

The line grew, eighty emptying theaters fifteen stories below, sending each its trickle toward the Midnight Frolic—men too tired to sleep, women with slim, syncopated hips, and eyes none too nice. The smell of fur and fragrant powder on warm flesh began to rise on a fog of best Havana smoke. At the elevators women dropped out of their cloaks and, in the bustle of checking, stood by, not unconscious of the damask finish to bare shoulders.

When Mr. Herman Loeb detached himself from the human tape-line before the box-office, the firm and not easily discomposed lines of his face had fallen into loose curves, the lower lip thrust forward and the eyebrows upward. Sheep and men in their least admirable moments have that same trick of face. He rejoined his companion, two slips of cardboard well up in the cup of his palm.

"Good seats, Herman?"

"I ask you, Sam, is it an outrage? Twenty bucks for a table on the side!"

"No!"

"Is that highway robbery or not, I ask you!"

Mr. Samuel Kahn hitched at his belt, an indication of mental ferment.

"I wouldn't live in this town, not if you gave it to me!"

"It's not the money, Sam. What's twenty dollars more or less on a business trip, and New-Year's Eve at that? But it's the principle of the thing. I hate to be made a good thing of!"

"Twenty bucks!"

"Yes, and like he was doing me a favor, that Louis Slups kyin the box-office who used to take tickets in our Olympic at home. Somebody at the last minute let go of his reservation or we couldn't have got a table."

"Twenty bucks, and we got to feel honored yet that they let us sit at a table to buy a dinner! But say, Herm, it's a great sight, ain't it?"

"There's only one little old New York! Got to hand it to this town—they're a gang of cut-throats, but they do things up brown. A little of it goes a long ways, but I always say a trip to New York isn't complete without a night at the Moncrieff Roof. You sit here, Sam, facing the stage."

"No, you! An old bachelor has got the right to sit closer to a girl-show than a married man."

They drew up before a small table edging a shining area of reserved floor space and only once removed from the burnt-orange curtains.

"A-ha!" exuded Mr. Samuel Kahn, his rather strongly aquiline face lifted in profile.

"A-ha!" exuded Mr. Loeb, smiling out of eyes ten years younger.

"What 'll you have, Sam?"

"Say, what's the difference? I'll take a cheese sandwich and a glass of beer."

"Now cut that! Maybe I squealed about the twenty bucks, but that don't make me out a short skate. This isn't Cherokee Garden at home, man. I'm going to blow my brother-in-law to New-Year's Eve in my own way, or know the reason why not. Here, waiter, a pint of extra dry and a layout of sandwiches."

"If you can stand it, I guess I can!"

"It's not on the firm, either, Sam; it's on me!"

"For the price of to-night ma and Etta would hang themselves, ain't it?"

"Say, we only live once. I always tell ma she can't take it with her when she goes. Anyways, for the discount we got on those Adler sport skirts, we can afford to celebrate."

"Say, Herman, I wish I had a dime for every dollar that is spent up here to-night. Look at the women! I guess American men don't make queens out of their wives!"

"For every wife who's up here to-night I wouldn't take the trouble to collect the dimes," said Mr. Loeb, with cunning distinction.

"I guess that ain't all wrong, neither. It isn't such a pleasure to be away from your family New-Year's Eve, but I can assure you I'd rather have Etta having her celebration with ma and grandma, and maybe the Bambergers over at the house, than up here where even a married woman can blush to be."

"Take it from me, old man, a flannel petticoat

in the family is worth all the ballet skirts on this roof put together."

"I bought ma and Etta each one of them handbags to-day at Lauer's for nine dollars. What they don't know about the price won't hurt them. Two for nine I'll tell them."

"To this day ma believes that five-hundred-dollar bar pin I brought her two years ago from Pittsburgh cost fifty at auction."

"There's Moe Marx from Kansas City just coming in! Spy the blonde he's with, will you? I guess Moe is used to that from home, nix! There's a firm, Marx-Jastrow, made a mint last year."

"Look!"

The lights had sunk down, the sea of faces receding into fog. The buzz died, too, and doors were swung against the steady shuffle of incomers. From behind the curtains a chime tonged roundly and in one key. One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve!

Then the orange curtains parted and on a gilded dais the width of the room, in startling relief against a purple circle the size of a tower clock, the Old Year, hoar on his beard and with limbs that shivered in an attitude of abdication, held out an hourglass to a pink-legged cherub with a gold band in his or her short curls.

A shout went up and a great clanging of forks against frail glass, the pop of corks and the quick fizz ensuing. The curtains closed and the lights flashed up. Time had just sailed another knot into space, and who cared?

At a center table a woman's slipper was already going the rounds. It began to sag and wine to ooze through the brocade.

"Well, Hermie, here's a happy New Year to you!"

"And to you, Sam, and many of 'em!"

"To ma and Etta and grandma!"

"To Kahn, Loeb & Schulien!"

"To Kahn, Loeb & Schulien and that to this time next year we got the Men's Clothing Annex."

They drank in solemn libation.

The curtains had parted again. A Pierrot, chalky white, whistled in three registers, soprano, bass, and baser. A row of soubrettes rollicked in and out again in a flash of bushy skirts.

"Say, look at the third one from this end with the black curls all bobbing. I'm for her!"

"Where?"

"Gone now!"

Mr. Kahn leaned across his singing glass, his eye quickened into a wink.

"Old man, you can pull that woman-hater stuff on the home folks, but it takes your brother-in-law to lead you to the live ones. Eh?"

"You dry up," said Mr. Loeb, peering between the halves of a sandwich.

On a glass runway built over the heads of the assembled, a crystal aisle for satin feet, the row of soubrettes suddenly appeared, peering over the crystal rail, singing down upon the sea of marcelled, bald, and dead heads. Men, sheepish of their smiles but with the small heels overhead clanging like castanets into their spirits, dared to glance up.

"Gad, Herman! What 'll they think up next? Whatta you know about that—all those little devils dancing right over our heads!"

"There she is!"

"Who?"

"The little one in the boy's black-satin suit, with the black curls bobbing!"

"Watch out, Herm! You'll die of crick in the neck."

"I don't see any blinkers on you!"

"Hey, old man! Your mouth's open."

"I know. I opened it," said Mr. Loeb, his head back and eyes that were suddenly bold staring up at the twinkling aisle.

At a table adjoining, a man reached up, flecking one of the tiny black-satin feet with a whirl of his napkin.

Then Mr. Herman Loeb, of St. Louis, committed an act of spontaneous combustion. When came the turn of the black satin and the bobbing curls to bend over the rail directly above him, he flung wide his arms, overturning a wine bottle.

"Jump!" he cried.

Beneath the short, black curls a mouth shaped like a bud reluctant to open, blew him a kiss. Then came a cue of music like an avalanche, and quicker than Harlequin's wink the aisle was clean.

"Gad!" said Mr. Loeb, his strong profile thrust forward and a light on it.

"That little one with the black curls? Say! You can put her on your watch-fob and take her home."

"Wouldn't mind!" said Mr. Loeb.

"You and Moe Marx are like all the women-haters. You don't know it, but you're walking in your sleep and the tenth-story window's open."

"We oughtn't to come up here in business clothes," said Mr. Loeb, eying his cuff-edges.

A woman sang of love. A chorus, crowned and girdled in inflated toy balloons, wreathed in and out among the tables.

"She's not in that crowd."

Men to whom life for the most part was grim enough vied for whose cigarette end should prick the painted bubbles. A fusillade ensued; explosions on the gold-powdered air—a battle *de luxe!*

Mr. Kahn threw back his head, yawned, and slid a watch from his waistcoat pocket.

"W-ell, a little of this goes a long way. If we want to pull out of this town day after to-morrow we've got to get down to Cedar Street early in the morning on that sweater job lot. It's about time for us to be getting across to the hotel."

"Wait!" said Mr. Loeb.

A jingling and a right merry cacophony of sound came fast upon the bubble bombardment, and then, to a light runnel of song, the row of twenty-four, harnessed in slotted sleigh-bells and with little-girl flounced frocks to their very sophisticated pink-silk knees.

The devices of vaudeville are perennial. Rigoletto, who set a court's sides aching, danced to bells. The row of twenty-four, pink and white as if the cradle had just yielded them up, shivered suddenly

into an ecstasy of sound, the jerked-up shoulder of one, the tossing curls of another, the naughty shrug of a third, eking out a melody.

A laugh rose off the crowd.

"Say, this town 'll fall for anything! That act's got barnacles. But the little devils look cute, though. Say—say, old man, cut that out! This is no place for your mother's son. Say!"

Mr. Loeb was leaning forward across the table, his head well ahead of his shoulders. From the third from the end of the row of twenty-four, a shoulder shrugging to the musical nonsense of bells was arching none too indirectly toward him, and once the black curls bobbed, giving a share of tremolo to the melody. But the bob was carefully directed, and Herman Loeb returned it in fashion, only more vehemently and with repetition.

"Say, Herman, enough is enough! You'll have her here at the table next. It's like Al Suss always says, the reason he woke up one morning and found himself married to the first pony in the sextet was because he stuck a stamp upside down on a letter to her and found he could be held for a proposal in stamp language."

To a great flare of the Negroid music, the row of twenty-four suddenly turned turtle, and prone on a strip of rug, heads to audience and faces to ceiling, twenty-four pairs of legs, ankleted in bells, kicked up a syncopated melody. From a Niagara of lace, insteps quivered an arpeggio. A chromatic scale bounced off a row of rapidly pointing toes. The third from the end, seized with sudden chill, quiv-

ered into grace notes, small pink feet kicking violently to the chandelier.

Men red with laughter pounded their plates. The rhythmic convulsion passed down the prostrate line, forty-eight little feet twinkled a grand finale, and the curtains swung, then opened, remaining so.

The line of twenty-four danced down and across the wide hair-line that separates life and stage, butterflies sipping from table to table. The cabaret was done. Lights resumed, and the business of food and drink.

Mr. Loeb flung out an arm, pulling awry a carefully averted pink sash.

"Say, little Jingle Bells, you and your friend!"

"Cut it out, Herm! If we want to be down on Cedar Street by—"

"What's your hurry, little one?"

"It ain't mine; it belongs to the management."

"Won't you join us?"

"Herm, that job-lot of sweaters—"

"Oh, come on, little Jingle Bells!"

"My friend, too?"

"Sure your friend."

They teetered, the two of them like animated dolls, arm in arm, and so at ease.

"Here, you little Black Curls, sit next to me, and you, Blondey, over there by my brother-in-law."

"What 'll you have, girls?"

"Anchovies and fine-chopped onions for mine. Tell 'em in the kitchen, waiter, I said *fine*, and if the gentlemen are going to order wine, bring me a plate of oyster crackers first to take off the edge of my emptiness."

"Sure, another bottle of wine, waiter."

"Hermie, we—"

"And you, little Jingle Bells, same as Blondey's order?"

"Yeh."

"Say, you know what?"

"No. What?"

"I fell for those bouncing black curls of yours before I was in the place five minutes."

At that there was an incredible flow of baby talk.

"Gemmemen ike ikkie gurl wiz naughty-naughty black curl-curlies?"

"You bet your life I do," said Mr. Loeb, unashamed of comprehension.

Mr. Kahn flashed another look at his watch.

"Say, don't you know, you girls oughtn't to keep us boys up so late. Ain't there no wear out to you?"

The yellow curls to his right bounced sharply.

"He asks if there's a wear out to us, Cleone? I wish it to you this minute, Baldy, that you had the muscles in the back of my legs. I guess you think it's choice for us girls to come out on the floor after the show!"

"Sylvette!"

"Yah, it's my New-Year's resolution to tell the truth for thirty minutes if I'm bounced for it. If you got to know it, it's a ten-per-cent. rake-off for us girls on every bottle of golden vichy you boys blow us to."

"Honest, Sylvette, you're wearing scrambled eggs instead of brains to-night. Why don't you cry a few brinies for the gemmemen while you're at it!"

That so quickened Mr. Loeb's risibilities that he dropped his hand over Miss Cleone St. Claire's, completely covering yet not touching it.

"You're a scream, kiddo! Gee! I like you!"

She drank with her chin flung up and her throat very white.

"Bubbles! Bubbles! God bless all my troubles!"

"Well, I'll be darned!" said Mr. Kahn, smiling at her.

"The gemmemen from out of town?"

"St. Louis."

"I had a friend out there—Joe Kelsannie, of Albuquerque. Remember him, Sylvette?"

"Do I!"

"I'm going out there myself some day if the going's good, and get me a cowboy west of Newark."

Mr. Loeb leaned forward, smiling into her quick-fire eyes.

"I'll take you!"

"Stick her on your watch-fob, Herman."

"No, sirree, I'll take her life size."

"Watch out, Hermie; remember the upside-down postage stamp!"

"Want to go, Jingle Bells?"

"Sure."

"But I'm on the level, little one. No kidding. Day after to-morrow. St. Louis—with me!"

Miss Cleone St. Claire drew herself up, the doll look receding somewhat from her gaze.

"Say, bo, you got me wrong. I'm one of the nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand chorus girls you could introduce your sister to. Aren't I, Syl?"

"You let that kid alone," said Miss Sylvette de Long, in a tone not part of her rôle. "When the traffic policeman sticks up his mitt it's time to halt, see?" Lines not before discernible in Miss De Long's face had long since begun to creep out, smoky shadows beneath her eyes and a sunburst of fine lines showing through the powder like stencil designs.

"Come on, Herm. It's getting late, and if we want to be down on Cedar—"

"You think I'm kidding this little black-eyed chum of yours, don't you, Blondey?"

"Sure not! You want 'er to grace the head of your table and wear the family heirlooms!"

"Well, Sam, you're my brother-in-law—married to my own sister and living under the same roof with me—am I a habitual lady-fusser, or do they call me Hermie the Hermit at home?"

"Never knew him to talk ten straight words to a skirt before, girls," said Mr. Kahn through a yawn; "and if you don't believe it, go out and ask Louis Slupsky, who used to play chinies with him."

"Say, you," said Miss De Long, edging slightly, "you're about as funny as a machine-gun, you are! If you got a private life, why ain't you back in St. Louis a night like this, showing her and the kids a good time?"

She was frankly tired, her eyelids darkening.

"I wish to Heaven I was," said Mr. Kahn, suddenly. "Take it from me, girl, it was nothing but a business hang-over kept me. Come, Herm, if we—"

"You think I'm kidding little Jingle Bells, don't you?"

Miss St. Claire sat back against her chair; her black eyes had quieted. "If you ain't kidding you must be crazy with the heat or dr—"

"Look at my glass. Have I touched it?"

"The man's raving, Syl! Wants to marry me and take me back to St. Louis, Thursday."

"Cut the comedy and come! Herm, it's getting on to three in the morning."

"This little girl keeps thinking I'm kidding, Blondey. I always knew if I ever fell for matrimony it would be just like this. Right off the reel. No funny business. Just bing! Bang! Done!"

"Catch me while I swoon—but he sounds on the level, Cleone."

"Well, what if he is? Of all the nerve! Whatta you know about me? How do you know I haven't got three kids and a crippled husband at home? How do you know—?"

"I know, little Jingle Bells! Why, I was as sure of you, the minute I clapped eyes on you, as if we'd been raised next door to each other. I can see right down in your little life like it was this glass of wine."

Miss St. Claire threw out her arms in a beautiful and sleepy gesture.

"Well, boys, this is a nice little party, but I got to get up at three o'clock to-morrow afternoon, and I need the sleep. Oh, how I love my morning sleep!" She drew back, her bare outflung arm pushing her from the table. "If you'll call me and my room-mate a taxi—"

"No, you don't, Jingle Bells!"

He placed a hand that trembled slightly on the sleeved part of her arm. She opened wider her very wide black eyes.

"Are you bats?" she said.

"I'm going to marry you and take you home with me, if I have to carry you off like a partridge."

"Cleone, I tell you the man means it!"

"You're right, Blondey. I never meant anything more in my life."

A sudden shortness of manner crept over Mr. Kahn.

"Man, you're drunk!" he cried, springing to his feet.

"See my glass!"

"Then you're crazy!"

"Sit down, old Baldy. Why's he crazy? That little room-mate of mine is as straight a little girl as—"

"Why, I tell you he's crazy! That man's the head of a big business. He can't kick up any nonsense like this. Come on, Herm, cut the comedy. It's time we were getting across to our hotel. Look at the crowd thinning, and what's left is getting rough. Come!"

"If you don't know how to behave yourself, Sam, in the presence of these ladies, maybe you better go back to the hotel alone. I'm going to see these young ladies to their door, and before we go me and this little girl are going to understand each other."

Mr. Kahn sat down again in some stupefaction.

"Well, of all the nerve! Who are you? Whatta you think I am? Syl, what's his game?"

Miss De Long thrust forward her tired and thinning face; her eyes had a mica gleam.

"Cleone, he wants to marry you. A decent man with a decent face from a decent town has taken a shine to you and wants to marry you. M-a-r-r-y! Do you get it, girl?"

"How do you know he's decent? I don't know no more about him than he knows about me. I—"

"'Ain't you got no hunch on life, girl? Look at him! That's how I know he's decent. So would you if you'd been in this business as long as me. Can't you tell a real honest-to-God man when you see one? A business man at that!"

"You got me right, Blondey. Kahn, Loeb & Schulien, Ladies' Wear, St. Louis. Here's my card. You give me an hour to-morrow, Jingle Bells, and I'll do all the credential stuff your little heart desires. Louis Slupsky knows me and my whole family. His mother used to stuff feather pillows for mine. Kahn here is my brother-in-law and partner in business. He's a slow cuss and 'ain't grasped the situation yet. But are you on, little one? Is it St. Louis Thursday morning, as Mrs.—?"

"Herm! You're cr—"

"Syl—what 'll I—do?"

"An on-the-level guy, Cleone. Marry! Do you hear? M-a-r-r-y! Say, and it couldn't happen to me!"

"Herman, man, I tell you you're off your head. Think once of your home—ma, Etta, grandma—with a *goy* girl that—"

"Easy there, Baldy, you're adding up wrong.

You and her both celebrates the same Sundays. If anybody should ask you for Sylvette de Long's birth certificate, look it up under the P's. Birdie Pozner. It's the same with my friend. Cleone, tell the gemmemen your real name! Well, I'll tell it for you. Sadie Mosher, sister to the great Felix Mosher who played heavy down at Shefsky's theater for twenty years. *Goy!* Say, Sammie, it's too bad a nut from the bug-house bought the Brooklyn Bridge to-day or I'd try to sell it to you."

"Little Jingle Bells, if I put you in a taxi now and shoot up those credentials, will you marry me to-morrow at noon?"

"I—oh, I dunno."

"Marry, he says to you, girl. Think of the minus number of times girls like us get that little word whispered to 'em. Think of the short season. Moncrieff's grouch. The back muscles of your legs! Marry, he says to you, girl! Marry!"

"To-morrow at noon, little one?"

"I—I sleep till three."

"And it couldn't 'a' been me!"

"Little Jingle Bells?"

"Why, y-yes, I—I'm on."

At three o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, in a magistrate's office, beneath a framed engraving of a judicial court in wigged session, Herman Schulien Loeb and Sadie Helen Mosher became as one. A bar of scant metropolitan sunshine, miraculously let in by a cleft between two skyscrapers, lay at the feet of the bride.

Slightly arear of them: Mr. Louis Slupsky; Mr. Samuel Kahn, with a tinge the color of apoplexy in his face; and Miss Sylvette de Long, her face thrust forward as if she heard melody. The voice of the magistrate rose like a bird in slow flight, then settled to a brief drone.

East is East and West is West, and St. Louis is neither. It lies like a mediator, the westerly hand of the east end of the country stretching across the sullenest part of the Mississippi to clasp the easterly hand of the west end of the country.

Indians have at one time or another left their chirography upon the face of St. Louis. But all that is effaced now under the hot lava of Americanism that is covering the major cities in more or less even layers. Now it stands atop its Indian mounds, a metropolis of almost a million souls, a twenty-story office-building upon the site of an old trading-post, and a subway threatening the city's inners. There is a highly restricted residence district given over to homes of the most stucco period of the Italian Renaissance, and an art-museum, as high on the brow of a hill as the Athenians loved to build. St. Louis has not yet a Champs-Élysées or a Fifth Avenue. And of warm evenings it takes its walks without hats. Neither is the café or the cabaret its evening solace.

It dines, even in its renaissance section, placidly *chez soi;* the family activities of the day here thrown into a common pool of discussion.

On Washington Boulevard, probably sixty dollars

a foot removed from the renaissance section, architecture suddenly turns an indifferent shoulder to period, Queen Anne rubbing sloping roof with neighbor's concrete sleeping-porch of the hygienic period. Only the building-line is maintained, the houses sitting comfortably back and a well-hosed strip of sidewalk, bordered in hardy maples, running clear and white out to De Balaviere Avenue, where the *art-nouveau* apartment-house begins to invade. In winter bare branches meet in deadlock over this walk. On the smooth macadamized road of Washington Boulevard automobiles try out their speed limit.

One such wintry day, with the early dusk already invading, Mrs. Herman Loeb, with red circles round her very black eyes, and her unrouged face rather blotched, sat in one of the second-floor-front rooms of a double buff-brick house on Washington Boulevard, hunched up in a red-velvet chair, chin cupped in palm, and gazing, through perfectly adjusted Honiton lace curtains, at the steady line of home-to-dinner motor-cars.

Warmth lay in that room, and a conservative mahogany elegance—a great mahogany double bed, immaculately covered in white, with a large monogram heavily hand-embroidered in its center; a mahogany swell-front dresser, with a Honiton lace cover and a precise outlay of monogramed silver. Over it a gilt-framed French engraving with "Maternal Love" writ in elegant script beneath. A two-toned red rug ate in footsteps.

Mrs. Loeb let her head fall back against the chair and closed her eyes. In her dark-stuff dress

with its sheer-white collar, she was part of the note of the room, except that her small bosom rose and fell too rapidly. A pungent odor of cookery began to invade; the street lamps of Washington Boulevard to pop out. The door from the hallway opened, but at the entrance of her mother-in-law Mrs. Loeb did not rise, only folded one foot closer under her.

"You, Sadie?"

"Yes."

"Herman home yet?"

"No."

"Smell? I fixed him red cabbage to-night."

"Yes, I smell."

"How she sits here in the dark. Thank goodness, Sadie, electricity we don't have to economize on."

She pushed a wall key, a center chandelier of frosted electric bulbs springing into radiance. In its immediate glare Mrs. Loeb regarded her daughter-in-law, inert there beside the window.

"Get your embroidery, Sadie, and come down by me and Etta till the men get home to supper. I want her to show you that cut-work stitch she's putting in her lunch napkins."

"Ugh!"

"What?"

Mrs. Bertha Loeb approached with the forward peer of the nearsighted. Time and maternity had had their whacks at her figure, her stoutness enhanced by a bothersome shelf of bust, but her face—the same virile profile of her son's and with the graying hair parted tightly from it—guiltless of

lines, except now, regarding her daughter-in-law, a horizontal crease came into her brow.

"You want to go sit a while by grandma, then?"

"No. Gee! can't—can't a girl just sit up in her room quiet? I'm all right."

"I didn't say, Sadie, you wasn't all right. Only a young girl with everything to be thankful for don't need to sit up in her room like it was a funeral, with her mother and sister and grandma in the same house."

On the mahogany arms of her chair Mrs. Herman Loeb's small hand closed in a tight fist over her damp wad of handkerchief.

"I—I—"

"What?"

"Nothing."

"Sadie, you been crying again."

"What if I have?"

"A fine answer from a girl to her mother."

"I—you—you drive me to it—your questions—"

"I shouldn't have the interest of my own son's wife at heart!"

"Can't a girl get—get blue?"

"Blue?"

"Yes, blue."

Mrs. Bertha Loeb reached out her hand with its wide marriage band slightly indented in flesh; the back of that hand was speckled with large, lightish freckles and trembled slightly.

"Sadie, ain't there just no way we can make you feel happy in St. Louis? Last night through the door to my room I couldn't help hear again you and

Herman with a scene. Take your feet down off the plush, Sadie."

"Oh yes, you heard, all right."

"'Ain't you got a good home here, Sadie? Everything in the world a girl could wish for! A husband as good as gold, like his poor dead father before him. 'Ain't we done everything, me and my Etta, to make you feel how—how glad we are to have you for our Hermie's wife?"

"Oh, I know, I know."

"What maybe we felt in the beginning—well, wasn't it natural, an only son and coming such a surprise—all that's over now. Why, it's a pleasure to see how grandma she loves you."

"I—I'm all right, I tell you."

"Didn't we even fix it you should go in a flat on Waterman Avenue housekeeping for yourself, if you wanted it?"

"Yes, and tie myself down to this dump yet. Not much!"

"Well, I only hope, Sadie Loeb, you never got in your life to live in a worse dump. I know this much, I have tried to do my part. Did I sign over this house to you and Herman for a wedding present, giving only to my own daughter the row of Grand Avenue stores?"

"I never said you didn't."

"Have you got the responsibility even to run your own house, with me and Etta carrying it on like always?"

"Am I complaining?"

"Do I ask of you one thing, Sadie, except maybe

that you learn a little housekeeping and watch how I order from the butcher, things that every wife should know if she needs it or not? In the whole year you been my daughter, Sadie, have I asked of you more than you should maybe help the up-stairs girl a little mornings, and do a little embroidery for your linen-chest, and that maybe, instead of sleeping so late till noon every morning, you should get up and have breakfast with your husband?"

"If you begin going over all that again I—I'll just yell!"

"With anybody pouting in the house I just 'ain't got heart to do nothing. I don't see, Sadie, that you had such fine connections in the East that you shouldn't be satisfied here."

"You just leave my friends in the East out of it. If you wanna know it, they're a darn sight better than the wads of respectability I see waddlin' in here to swap *Kaffee Klatsches* with you!"

"Just let me tell you, Sadie Loeb, you can be proud such ladies call on you. A girl what don't think no more of her husband's business connections than not to come down-stairs when Mrs. Nathan Bamberger calls! Maybe our friends out here got being good wifes and good housekeepers on the brain more as high kicking in New York; but just the same Mrs. Nathan Bamberger, what can buy and sell you three times over, ain't ashamed to go in her Lindell Avenue kitchen, when her husband or her son likes red cabbage, what you can't hire cooked, or once in a while a miltz."

"Say, if I've heard that once, I've—"

"Then, too, Sadie, since we're talking—it's a little thing—I haven't liked to talk about it, but I—I got the first time I should hear the word *ma* on your lips. You think it's so nice that a daughter-in-law should always call me 'Say,' like a bed-post?"

"I—I can't, Mrs. Loeb—it—it just won't come—mother."

"Don't tell me you don't know any better! A girl what can be so nice with poor old blind grandma, like you been, can be nice with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, too, if she wants to be. I didn't want I should ever have to talk to you like this, Sadie, but sometimes a — a person she just busts out."

And then Mrs. Herman Loeb leaped forward in her chair, her small tight fist pounding each word:

"Then let me go! Whatta you holding me here for? Let me go back, Mrs.—mother! Let me go! I don't deny it, you're too good for me round here. I don't fit! Let me go back to the old room and—my old room-mate where—where I belong with my —my crowd. You tell what you just said to Herm! Get him to let me go back with him on his trip tomorrow night. Please, Mrs.—mother—please!"

"You mean to New York with him on his business trip for a visit?"

"Call it that if you want to, only let me go! You—you can tell them later that—that I ain't coming back. I—I've begged him so! I don't belong here. You just said as much yourself. I don't belong here. Let me go, Mrs. Loeb. Let me go! You tell him, Mrs. Loeb, to let me go."

Mrs. Bertha Loeb suddenly sat down, and the color flowed out of her face.

"That I should live to see this day! My Herman's wife wants to leave him! Oh, my son, my son! What did you do to yourself! A di—a separation in the Loeb family! I knew last night when I heard through the door and how worried my poor boy has looked for months, that it didn't mean no good. Since her first month here I've seen it coming. I did my part to—"

"Yes, Mrs. Loeb, and I done my part!"

"Oh—oh—oh, and how that boy of mine has catered to her! Humored her every whim to keep her contented! I always say it's the nix-nux wives get the most attentions and thanks from their husbands. I—"

"I done my part. I've tried as much as you to make myself fit in out here. I—I just ain't your kind, Mrs. Loeb. Yours and—Etta's. I—I can't be saving and economical when I see there's plenty to spend. I—I was raised with my brother down in Shefsky's theater, where nobody cares about monogramed guest towels and about getting up before noon if they don't want to. The evenings here kill me! Kill me! I hate pinochle! I gotta have life, Mrs. Loeb. I hate *Kaffee Klatsches* with a lot of—I —I tell you I got different blood in my veins, Mrs. Loeb, I—"

"No, no, Sadie Mosher Loeb, that kind of talk don't go. You got just the same *shabbos* like us. Saturday is your—"

"Yes, yes, I'm in the right church, all right, Mrs.

Loeb, but I'm in the wrong pew. Mrs. Loeb, please can't you understand I'm in the wrong pew!"

And all her carefully confined curls, springing their pins, she fell forward a shivering mass.

In that surcharged moment and briskly exuding a wintry out-of-doors, Mr. Herman Loeb entered and stood for a moment in the open doorway, in the act of removing his greatcoat.

"Herman, my son! Oh, my son!"

"What's wrong, ma? Sadie!"

"It's come, Herman, like I always predicted to Etta it would. Your wife, my poor boy, she wants to leave you. This should happen to a Loeb yet—a separation in the family! My poor boy! My poor boy!"

"Why, ma, what — what's Sadie been telling you?"

At that Mrs. Herman Loeb raised her streaming face, her eyes all rid of their roguery and stretched in despair.

"I didn't want to let out to her, Herman. I wanted to make a quiet get-away, you know I did. But she nagged me! She nagged me!"

"Ma, you shouldn't—"

"She heard us last night and Heaven knows how many nights before that. She's wise. She knows. She knows it's been a year of prison here for—"

"Oh, my poor boy! Prison! A girl like her finds herself married into one of the most genteel families in St. Louis, a girl what never in her life was used to even decent sheets to sleep on!"

"Ma!"

"Till three o'clock in the afternoon she told me herself how her and them girls used to sleep, two and three in a boarding-house room, and such a mess!"

"Ma, if you and Sadie don't cut out this rowing I'll put on my hat and go back down-town where I came from. What is this, anyway, a barroom or a home out on Washington Boulevard? You want grandma to hear you? Ma! Sadie!"

"My poor boy! My poor boy!"

"I didn't start it, Herm. I was sitting up here quiet. All I ask, Herm, is for you to take me back to New York to-morrow night on your trip. Let me go, Herm, for—for an indefinite stay. It ain't this house, Herm, and it ain't your mother or your sister and—and it ain't you—it ain't any one. It's all of you put together! I can't stand the speed out here! There ain't none!"

"I guess she wants, Hermie, for her bad-girl notions you should give up the best retail business in St. Louis and take her to live in New York, where she can always be in with that nix-nux theatri—"

"No, no, he knows I don't want that!"

"If she did, ma, we'd go!"

"Herm knows it was all a mistake with me. I didn't know my own mind. I wanna go back along where I came from and where I belong! It ain't like I was the kind of a girl with another man in the case—"

"We should thank her, Hermie, that there ain't more scandal mixed up in it yet!"

"Ma!"

"My poor boy, what could have had his pick from the first girls in St.—"

"Ma!"

There was an edge to Mr. Loeb's voice that had the bite of steel. He tossed his greatcoat to the snowy bed, walking between the bed-end and the mantel, round to the crouched figure of his wife.

"There, there, Sadie!" he said in his throat, and, stooping over her: "I give in! I give in!"

Her head flew up.

"Herm!"

"My son!"

"No, no, ma, it's no use trying to put anything but a jingle-bell harness on poor little Jingle Bells. She don't understand us any more than we—we can understand her!"

"That's it, Herm; that's why I say if you'll only let me go!"

"Oh, my God! A separation in the Loeb family! My poor dead husband! My daughter Etta, president of the Ladies' Auxiliary! Grandma—"

"'Sh-h-h, ma! You want grandma to hear?"

"My son, the cleanest, finest—"

"Ma!" There were lines in his face as if a knot at his heart were tightening them. "You mustn't blame her, ma; and, Sadie, you mustn't feel this way toward my mother. Nobody's to blame. I've been thinking this thing over more than you think, Sadie, and I—I give in. She's a poor little thing, ma, that's been trapped into something she can't fit into."

"Yes, Herm, that's it."

"It's natural. My fault, too. I carried her off like a partridge. Don't cry, little Jingle Bells! To-morrow night we leave for New York, and when I come back you're going to stay on with—"

"Sylvette says—"

"With friends, indefinitely. Don't cry, little Jingle Bells, don't! 'Sh-h-h, ma! There, didn't I tell you you'd rouse grandma!"

With her hands stuffed against rising sobs, his mother ceased rocking herself to and fro in her straight chair, her eyes straining through the open door. A thin voice came through, querulous, and then the tap-tap of a cane.

Mr. Herman Loeb answered the voice, standing quiet at the bed-end.

"Nothing is the matter, grandma."

"Come and get me, Herman."

"Yes, grandma."

He hastened out and re-entered almost immediately, leading Mrs. Simon Schulien, her little figure so fragile that the hand directing the cane quavered of palsy, and the sightless face, so full of years and even some of their sweetness, fallen in slightly, in presage of dust to dust.

"Bertha?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Here, grandma, by the window is your chair."

He lowered her to the red-velvet arm-chair, placing her cane gently alongside.

"So!"

She moved her sightless face from one to the other, interrogating each presence.

"Sadie?"

"Yes, grandma."

"How you holler, children! Everything ain't right?"

"Yes, grandma. Ma and Sadie and me been making plans. To-morrow night Sadie goes with me to New York on my trip. A little pleasure trip."

The little face, littler with each year, broke into smile.

"So, little Sadie-sha, you got good times, not? A good husband and good times? New York! To New York she goes, Bertha?"

"Yes, mamma."

Mrs. Schulien fell to crooning slightly, redigesting with the senility of years.

"To New York! Nowadays young wives got it good. How long you stay, Hermie?"

"It's just my Pittsburgh-New York trip, grandma."

"Sadie, come here by grandma."

She approached with the tears drying on her face, her bosom heaving in suppressed jerks.

"Yes, grandma." And patted the little clawlike hand, and the bit of white hair beneath the fluted cap, and a bit of old lace fastened with an old ivory cameo and covering the old throat.

"You got good times, not?"

"Yes, grandma."

"And you'm a good girl, Sadie. Eh? Eh?"

"Y-yes, grandma."

"When you come back from New York, you bring grandma a fine present, not?"

"Yes, yes, grandma."

"A quilted underjacket wholesale, for when grandma rides out in the wheel-chair."

"Y-yes, grandma."

To the saturnine, New York of its spangled nights is like a Scylla of a thousand heads, each head a menace. Glancing from his cab window one such midnight, an inarticulate expression of that fear must have crept over and sickened Mr. Herman Loeb. He reached out and placed his enveloping hand over that of his wife.

"Well, Sadie, you take good care of yourself, girl. No matter how we decide to—to end this thing, remember you're my wife—yet."

"Yes, Herman," said Mrs. Loeb, through a gulp.

"Don't stint, and remember how easily you get cold from draughts."

"I won't. I will."

"If you find yourself too crowded in that room with your friend, get a better one farther away from the theaters, where it isn't so noisy—maybe by yourself."

"I'll see."

"You won't be afraid to go back to that room now, with Sylvette still at the show?"

"N-no."

"If I was you—now mind, I'm only suggesting it—but if I was you I wouldn't be in such a hurry about getting back in that roof show, Sadie. Maybe in a few days something better may show up or—or you'll change your mind or something."

"I gotta get back to work to keep from thinking. Anyway, I don't want to be sponging on you any longer than I can help."

"You're my wife, aren't you?"

She sat, a small cold huddle in the center of the cab seat, toward him her quivering face flashing out as street lamps bounced past. They were nearing the great marble façade of the Seventh Avenue Terminal.

"Herman, I—I hate to see everything bust up like this—you—you such a prince and all—but like Syl says, I—I guess all fools ain't dead yet!"

"You've had time to work this thing out for yourself now, Sadie, but like I was saying before, anybody can play stubborn, but—but it's a wise person who ain't ashamed to change his mind. Eh, Sadie? Eh?"

They were sliding down a runway and drew up now alongside a curb. A redcap, wild for fee, swung open the cab door, immediately confiscating all luggage.

"No, no, not that! You carry that box, Herm. It's the padded underjacket for grandma. Tell her I—I sent it to her, Herm—with—with love."

"Yes, Sadie."

She was frankly crying now, edging her way through the crowd, running in little quick steps to match her pace to his.

At the trainside, during the business of ticket inspection, she stood by, her palm pat against her mouth and tears galumphing down. With a face that stood out whitely in the gaseous fog, Mr.

Loeb fumbled for the red slip of his berth reservation.

"Well, Sadie girl, three minutes more and—"

"Oh—oh, Herm!"

"If you feel as bad as that, it's not too late, Sadie. I—you—it takes a wise little girlie to change her mind. Eh? Eh?"

"No—no, Herm, I—"

He clenched her arm suddenly and tightly.

"If you want to come, girl, for God's sake now's your time. Sadie honey, you want to?"

She shook him off through gasps.

"No, no. Herm, I—I can't stand it—it's only that I feel so bad at seeing you— No—no—not—not now."

The all-aboard call rang out like a shout in a cave.

He was fumbling at his luggage for the small pasteboard box, haste fuddling his movements.

"I'll be in Pittsburgh to-morrow till seven, honey. Sleep over it, and if you change your mind, catch the eleven-forty-five St. Louis flyer out of here to-morrow morning, and that train 'll pick me up at Pittsburgh—eleven forty-five."

"Oh, I—"

"You be the one to bring this box home, with your own little hands, to poor grandma, honey, and—and if you don't change your mind, why—why, you can send it. You be the one to bring it to her, honey. Remember, it's a wise girlie knows when to change her mind!"

"Oh, Hermie—Hermie!"

"All—aboard!"

With her hands clasped and her uncovered face twisted, she watched the snakelike train crawl into oblivion.

When she re-entered the taxicab she was half swooning of tears.

"Don't cry, baby," said the emboldened chauffeur, placing the small pasteboard box up beside her.

In the great old-fashioned room in Fortieth Street —of two beds and two decades ago—she finally in complete exhaustion slid into her white iron cot against the wall, winding an alarm-clock and placing it on the floor beside her.

Long before Miss Sylvette de Long, with her eyelids very dark, tiptoed in, and, rubbing the calves of her legs in alcohol, undressed in the dark, she was asleep, her mouth still moist and quivering like a child's.

At nine-thirty and with dirty daylight cluttering up the cluttered room, the alarm-clock, full of heinous vigor, bored like an awl into the morning.

THE END